

Still The Contract of Atlas, Book VII.

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by fearboss



「case.アトラスの契約(下)」

三田誠
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From left to right and bottom to top: Flat Escardos, a student of the department of Modern Magecraft in the Clock Tower; Svin Glascheit, a student of the department of Modern Magecraft in the Clock Tower; Zepia Eltnam Atlassia, the Director of the Atlas Institute, Dead Apostle; Illumia, a nun of the village church; Bersac, the Gravekeeper of Blackmore Graveyard, Gray, the disciple of Lord El-Melloi II; Lord El-Melloi, the Lord of the Department of Modern Magecraft in the Clock Tower.

Prologue:

◆序章◆



Ever since I was old enough to remember things, I knew that footsteps can convey emotion.

For example, pit-pattering footsteps of a lively crowd.

Quiet footsteps, hushed like a prayer.

And footsteps that revealed a trace of sadness beneath the cacophony of noise.

Since most people didn't realize how much footsteps could disclose, it was even easier to understand their feelings this way. Ah, for someone like me, who wasn't good at talking to people, a person's footsteps could tell me more about them than a conversation.

My parents had two types of footsteps.

One when they showed love toward me, and one when they worshipped me.

Gradually, the latter began to become more prevalent. There was a fateful change around ten years ago. ...In this situation, maybe you could call it fatal.

The footsteps changed little by little every morning.

From the day it had been announced, when the footsteps were somewhat clumsy but full of joy.

To the sort of reverent footsteps that sounded like those of a devotee receiving the will of the gods.

When had the aroma of bread started sending chills down my spine? When had warm soup and fresh salads started making me feel estranged? Most of all, when since had they started worrying about every tiny expression I made as I ate, making the urge to bawl my eyes out rise within me?

Actually, I knew.

It began sometime around ten years ago.

When my body had started transforming in an alarming way, and when the villagers had begun calling me the blessed child. There were already hardly any people around

my age who I could talk to, and after that happened, there were none left.

After my father passed away, my mother had begun fussing about my life more, managing not only prayer and meals but also the order in which I ate things and how I dressed. My attitude towards my surroundings was naturally influenced by her.

...Ah, no.

There was still someone.

Even in this kind of situation, I had one friend.

That guy didn't have feet, so he didn't have footsteps. However, it neither ran from me nor worshipped me.

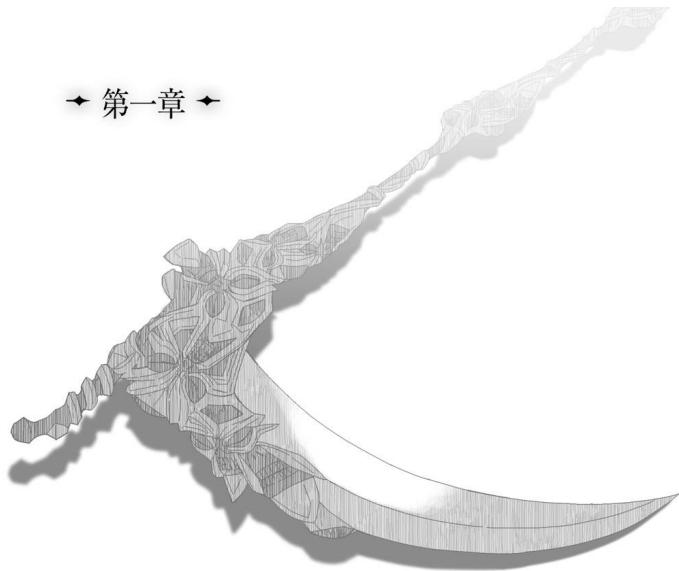
“Crying again, Idiot Gray.”

The box in a birdcage that always talked like this. The sealing Mystic Code (?) that had been awakened to replace all I had lost during my transformation. And now—

-End of Prologue of Book 7-

Chapter 1, Part 1:

♦ 第一章 ♦



We collapsed in the narrow underground tunnel.

The spotted walls and ceilings that revealed the dirt of the tunnel looked as if they could collapse at any moment, making me feel very uneasy.

Though the quietude probably meant that this place had remained the same for the past couple of centuries, I could not help but get affected by its appearance.

“...So, we’re retreating first, are we,” my mentor said breathily, trying to stabilize his breathing. His gaze was directed at the person who had just joined us. A hazy knight in shining silver armor stood there.

The word “hazy” here referred to not only his expression. His entire figure was blurred, materializing in and out of existence. Even so, combined with his incredibly vivid and expressive demeanor, it was still generally possible to distinguish his feelings.

“Of course. I wasn’t good at this sort of street-fighting nonsense in the first place. The things I value most are these hands for holding pretty girls, and this tongue. It’s already almost a miracle that I managed to mow down enough of those impatient bone soldiers to get you two to safety.”

I suppose he had to be emotionally resilient(?) to be able to say that with a straight face(?).

Though, we did receive his help, so I wasn’t sure how to respond to what he said.

When we were escaping from the bone soldiers, we had ran for our lives without bothering to consider anything to arrive at this place. It seemed that there were many other paths besides the path we went down initially. We were now hiding out in one of them.

“.....”

I was still in a state of confusion. I never would have never thought that someone like a knight would spring out from Add even in my wildest dreams. It was simply not something I could have reasonably thought up of.

I still held the giant scythe in my hands.

Yet, I was still driven to the brink of collapse by terror.

My mentor glanced at me from a distance before he spoke.

“You introduced yourself as Sir Kay, didn’t you.”

“Huh. You even know to add the ‘Sir’.”

“Of course, Sir Kay. If you’re referring to the adoptive brother of King Arthur.”

Though it was something I had already realized, I still almost yelped in surprise.

The legend of King Arthur. The famous British tale of a holy sword and a round table. The original legend behind the story of knights, full of countless adventures and romance.

Hearing those words, the knight gave a tsk.

“Well, what a pity it must be that I’m the one who’s here. Though, when it comes to legends, it’s inevitable that the reality’ll be a let-down. After all, aren’t the even stars in the night sky just lumps of rock anyway. Though some people probably think that it doesn’t matter as long as they shine, but I’m not interested in that sort of boring nonsense.”

He frowned displeasedly.

Every movement of his made me confused and agitated.

I knew these movements. Though I recognized them, they were not the same from what I remembered. Even so, some part of me was sure that though they were different, they came from the same place. The contradiction between what I felt and what I remembered made me feel uneasy.

“...Servants summoned by the Holy Grail will receive knowledge of the present from it, so Servants not summoned by the Holy Grail will be given knowledge of the present by the world.”

“Ha. You mages are always so full of garbage. What, will bookworms fall out of you like an old book if you get shaken too hard?”

“Possibly.”

Seeing my mentor’s somewhat serious nod, the knight shrugged even more unhappily.

“Though, that answer only gets thirty points. I’m not even a Servant, much less a Heroic Spirit. Because I didn’t come from that throne or whatever you call it, the world doesn’t give a crap about me. The stuff I brought up before all came from the knowledge of that stingy idiot of a sealing Mystic Code,” he corrected.

That last sentence had the most impact on me.

The words that had been stuck in my throat for the past while finally erupted forth in a yell.

“What happened to Add!”

I couldn’t even wait long enough to stand up, so I moved towards him while still hugging my knees.

“It’s not responding to my calls! Is it broken!”

It was probably the first time in my life that I had forced someone I had just met to answer a question like this. However, all of my fear had been shoved to the back of my head as I approached the knight in silver.

The knight extended his hand and knocked on the giant scythe with a thud.

“It’s not broken.”

As he said that, the knight— Kay shook his head.

It was impossible to explain just how relieving that answer was to me.

“Though, the functions have stopped working temporarily. After all, all the Magical Energy stored up in there was

probably all used up to get me to materialize. Of course, the other reason why it managed to work was also because of the environment here.”

“It’s stopped functioning...”

I held onto the scythe tightly and swallowed. How long was this “temporarily”?

Was it a day? A month? Maybe a year? Or perhaps even longer than that?

However, it seemed that not even the knight knew the answer to this question. Though it was the question I wanted to know the answer to desperately, I forced myself not to, and tried to find a more meaningful question to ask. I had mountains of questions, so I had to choose a few useful ones out of them.

“Then, why would you get summoned from Add...”

“The mage over there’s already figured it out, right?” He tossed the subject over. My mentor did not reply immediately. After carefully considering his hypothesis, he spoke.

“You were the Personality Model for Add, yes? ‘Personality Model’, in this case, also includes specific physical and equipment conditions. After all, the personality of someone is not completely dependent on their mind. ...Though, the reason why anything can materialize this way is puzzling,” my mentor said.

“Pretty much, yes.”

“Personality... Model...?”

“Basically, this [lance],” the knight said, pointing to my [scythe]. That meant that he knew the truth behind the

lance, but I guess this was obvious since he had been summoned by Add.

The holy lance Rhongomyniad.

The lance once used by King Arthur, a Noble Phantasm on par with the holy sword Excalibur.

“Actually, I’m the Personality Model used for the Mystic Code meant to seal the lance, so I was sent here originally with the lance and that guy’s corpse,” continued the knight, somewhat irritatedly.

“And then, when they were sealing the lance, I was chosen as the related person with the most compatible personality. Hmph, it was just that I was different from those other knights(idiots) because I didn’t care about all that mystery nonsense. Only those idiots would try to break a seal just because it was there. That sort of guy should be shoved into the ground for as long as possible.”

I could only understand about half of the knight’s words.

He was probably discussing the king he once served.

King Arthur.

To him, that person was his adoptive little brother —Or, according to the legends of my hometown, little sister, though their relationship seemed to be quite complicated.

“I don’t know what ended up happening to that guy’s corpse. That Glastonbury place did say that the body’s there, perhaps there might even be something behind that. As they say, once something gets worshipped, meaning gets added to it. Since she was originally protected by the island itself anyway, there’s really no need to have just one burial place,” said the knight in a light yet solemn tone.

However, it made my heart feel heavy in my chest. Every word he spoke was like the toll of a knell from the distant past. Perhaps this was because I had come into contact with it before. The fragments of the knights, including Sir Kay, that I had heard when I undid the Seal of Thirteen.

“This is a battle for survival.” —Approved, Kay.

“.....”

I took a deep breath.

My thoughts belonged to myself alone.

Even if I had heard his voice then, I could not impose that onto him. Even if I told him that I had been encouraged by his voice before, it was the person who stood in front of me now who I needed to face.

I carefully considered my thoughts and then raised my head to look at the knight.

Just then, my eyes met with those of the knight.

“Though, you really look quite like her.”

“Huh?”

“Never mind, pretend I didn’t say anything. Similar, but different. Yes, completely different.” He said to himself, nodding.

Was there a resemblance or not?

Of course I knew who the knight was referring to. After all, I had always been compared to that person.

“Um, do I look like—”

“—A person’s appearance is not simply determined by their face. Not a single other person will be like that guy, not

even in a hundred years. Perhaps someone who bears some speck of resemblance might appear in a millennium."

After he finished his sentence, the knight limbered up his shoulders. (?)

"Returning to the subject, you two just want to get out of this mess as soon as possible, don't you? I'll be with you until you do. After all, I was only summoned by that guy to do this. Though the working conditions are hardly ideal, it's endurable, since it's only for a while."

"You say that we're in a mess. Is that because you already know of our experiences?"

Hearing my mentor's question, the knight responded huffily.

"Of course I know. You called it [the second cycle] or something, didn't you."

The second cycle.

Because of Zepia, we had been removed from our original timeline and placed here, six months ago. Though I still didn't know if it was really the past, it was definitely similar.

That time in the past when I had just met my mentor.

"Did you also learn of this through Add?"

"Yes. It's too complicated to explain in detail, but that box basically knows everything that kid sees and hears. That information is also shared with me."

"I have one last question," my mentor added.

"What exactly is this system of tunnels underground?"

"Sadly, I don't know anything Add doesn't know. I've never been brought here in my past life, either," said the knight, shrugging exaggeratedly.

"Though, I suppose you could call it the true Blackmore Graveyard."

His low, somber voice settled into the cold darkness of the crypt.

-End of Part 1 of Chapter 1 of Book 7-

Chapter 1, Part 2:

[...She escaped?]

Her thoughts quietly resounded in the cave.

The masked girl sat in the middle of the cavern.

Strange soldiers of bone surrounded her, as if they were protecting her. Though the scene was jarring enough to be something out of a horror film, it gave off an odd sense of loyalty and sincerity.

As if it was part of a story of knights in ancient times.

[What happened?]

To her question, a couple of bone soldiers clacked their teeth together. Though no words were exchanged, the girl seemed to gather some information from the actions of the bone soldiers.

[A knight in silver armor appeared?] She remarked, after a few seconds of consideration. The masked girl propped her chin onto one hand and sank into thought. [Give chase.]

The bone soldiers began to move.

They scattered into the bifurcated tunnels in small groups. Though it was a mystery as to what they were, these

soldiers comprised only of bone and Magical Energy seemed to have minds of their own.

The masked girl still sat atop the rock.

The armor that entwined with the rock resembled a flower of iron. If so, perhaps the boulder beneath her was her throne. If those bone soldiers were her knights, then she could indeed be called a queen.

The queen of the underground.

In the past, perhaps she would have been the queen of the underworld.

“If she does manage to escape... then let her be,” she muttered to herself after some time.

It was a sound that was as raspy as the scraping together of stones, as if someone who hadn’t spoken in years was forcing their vocal cords to produce noise.

“Escape somewhere far, far away, where no one can reach. If that place really exists, escape all the way to that Everdistant Utopia (Avalon).”

Her words seemed almost like a prayer.

“Though, that sort of place doesn’t exist at all. Especially for you and I.”

The low voice echoed through the cavern. Just as even its echo seemed to fade into the darkness, there was a thud.

The masked girl turned. It came from the direct opposite direction the soldiers had gone in.

[What is it.] She asked again with her thoughts. A scent came from that direction.

The scent seemed to tell her something, and she nodded slightly.

[...Is that so. I've heard that the church has been watching this place. Are they also starting to act now?]

The girl in the mask reacted as if she had anticipated this long ago.

For that reason, her next words were said quickly, as if they were the results of calculations completed many years ago. There was almost even a trace of boredom in them.

[I understand. If that is the case, I shall follow the ancient contracts and vow to expel them from here.]

A warm, moist wind blew through the underground tunnels.

After that, the conclusion was cast.(*TN: can you cast a conclusion? I have no idea*)

[The time has come for me to become "her".]

*

The setting sun hung low on the horizon.

In the wash of crimson that dyed the mountain red, a group of people were at work in the village.

The church was at the center of this flurry of activity. This place, which had been sequestered in tranquility throughout its long history, had suddenly been invaded by a completely different atmosphere.

First of all, the door had been broken down.

The stained glass panes next to it had also been smashed. The holy water font looked like it had been struck by a blunt object, while plates and censers had been swept to the floor.

Everything that had been brought in from outside of the village had been destroyed, as if the original form had finally been revealed.

...The one who stood at the barely-intact pulpit was not the priest.

“...I see.”

The raspy voice travelled through the church.

After a few seconds of pause, the old woman raised her head. It was the person who the villagers called “Granny.” Perhaps you could call her the leader of the village.

A large number of villagers had gathered in front of her. It was around double the number that would come here for mass usually. Though, the atmosphere now was completely different from what it was usually like in the church. No, perhaps you could say that the villagers had finally shown their true colors.

“Listen carefully. The fragments of our great king have finally reached a decision.” The villagers cheered to that, as if the old woman’s words were prophecies from a god. It was the reason why they had gathered here.

The normalcy of the village was all just a disguise. They had been born for this singular purpose ever since tens of generations ago. Everyone was extremely glad that they had been born in this era to witness Gray’s transformation.

(*TN: Using they/them pronouns for these people because the original text doesn’t use any pronouns here*)The middle-aged person who had been the owner of the equipment shop hefted their sharpened hoe. The cook who always dozed off while running the only restaurant in the village now sharpened their treasured dagger.

Everyone smiled at the thought of that girl.

Everyone was as happy about that girl's growth as if she was their own children.

"You all understand, yes?"

Her voice seemed as if she had gotten ten years younger.

"Go and greet our great monarch, the once and future king. The time has finally arrived," the old woman instructed.

The church was completely silent.

However, everyone was practically shaking with excitement. They carried strong, almost fanatic sort of will. This group of approximately a hundred people was so united in their goal that they could now be seen as a singular, giant creature.

"We must not let her leave this village," the old woman continued and said.

"Magdalena."

The woman whose name was called quietly walked up.

It was Gray's mother. As if she had only just remembered that it was her own name, she raised her head happily.

"Have you found Gray?"

"Yes, we know her approximate location."

She said that with a smile. Behind her, there was the sound of dripping water.

The dark red liquid formed a pool, and its foul scent spread in the summer air.

The messenger from the church hung his head and did not move. Blood still flowed from the wounds on the hanged

man. This sort of torture, which not even trained people could withstand, had been completed by Magdalena herself.

“Eliminate them. Just like how we battled for our independence back then in these mountains. Roar, for this land is our holy land, which none can invade. —Indeed! No one shall hinder the descendant of our great king, who we have longed for since days of yore!”

Suddenly, the old woman’s expression softened.

She raised her wrinkled hands. The light of the setting sun that streamed through the shattered stained glass windows dyed her hands in a bloody red.

“We swear this upon our Holy Mother!”

The black-dyed statue stared down at them with the same expression as always.

-End of Part 2 of Chapter 1 of Book 7-

Chapter 1, Part 3:

“...There’s something that I’d like to make sure of while we’re at it,” the knight suddenly said.

We were carefully investigating the surrounding terrain. According to the knight, we first needed to find out how to get out of this system of tunnels. He also said that it would be better to check out the nearby diversions than to wander around aimlessly.

“What did you do during the time between [the last half of the third day and the fourth day] of the First Cycle?”

This question made me cry out uncontrollably. (??) The knight stared straight at my mentor with his hazy face.

“You don’t remember? Didn’t you say that you inherited Add’s memories.”

“Unfortunately, there’s nothing in Add’s memory about what happened after the third night. The memories stop after meeting the guys at the church, returning home, and eating dinner. I’m afraid that Gray’s food had probably been drugged. Because Add’s consciousness is in tune with Gray’s, every time this one goes to sleep or loses consciousness, Add enters a similar state. The people from the village know this.”

“Wait.”

My mentor raised a hand and interrupted him.

“You say they drugged her.”

“You’re really asking that now? It’s exactly like I said. The villagers aren’t those moe (*TN: Couldn’t think of a better adjective, wouldn’t have said that but you get the point*) girls that I like, they’re not afraid to lay fingers on little Gray here.”

My mentor’s shoulders shook slightly.

He knew, of course.

The reason why he hadn’t looked deeply into the events of the fourth day when we met and went over the events in the First Cycle was because he was afraid of touching on anything that might evoke my psychological trauma. When I first left my village, I had detested discussing anything related to it. I wasn’t even curious at all when I heard that they had discovered the corpse of someone who looked exactly like me. I had completely averted my eyes from my village, and never considered thinking about what happened the last day before I left. I thought that since I wasn’t there

anymore, I should just leave everything behind and start anew with London and the Clock Tower.

If it wasn't for my mentor, or the members of the El-Melloi Classroom including Reines, I would have never considered returning to this village.

"This village was always like that sort of a place," the knight said quietly. The sarcastic tone with which he said it made it feel as if he was talking not to other people but to himself.

"The sole purpose of this village is to transform Gray into a replica of King Arthur. Ah, to think that entire generations spent who knows how long on this kind of boring thing. It wouldn't even suffice to call it a grudge (?). Though the idea of a family business sounds pretty good, there's just no point to doing this sort of thing," the knight begrudgingly said, revealing what we had known all along in an instant.

I had always known this. However, my mentor froze briefly in response to that, which was undoubtedly something worth being happy about (?). Most people who dealt with mystery completely disregarded common practices in the rest of the world. No, it was that they didn't care about those things in the first place, like all the mages I had met so far.

"Hey, Gray, do you really remember nothing? Though the drugs would have made your consciousness become blurred, you must remember something. Even if you really are a forgetful idiot, there must be information hidden in the nooks of your brain, right?"

His words shot through me like the sharpened point of a spear. "Is [this] the reason why you avoided anything related to your hometown after you left?"

His sharp words made sparks fly in my mind.

“—Ahh! (*TN: Alternatively, ouch*)”

“Gray!”

I stopped my mentor, who wanted to rush over to me, and used my other hand to clasp my head.

Indeed. Though I was only half-awake then, I still had a trace of consciousness.

Ah, yes, though my senses were blurred, the smell I had smelled then still lingered in my mind. It was the smell of rotting weeds and water, a miasma that made me feel like my throat was going to rot as I breathed it in. There was no place in the village that was like this. However, I did know of one place.

“It’s... the swamp...”

“The swamp?”

My mentor’s voice seemed so distant. The senses from my flashback had shaken my brain(?). I did experience this. This receptor (body) did process these fragments before, but they had disappeared from my mind. I desperately tried to drag those fragmented memories out like a spinning wheel, but as soon as I managed to pull some out, it disappeared like sea foam.

“I... that’s right... I saw...”

What?

That was all I could recall.

The doors to my sealed memories were still locked. A couple of rays of light shone from the gap between them. I gathered the scattered fragments to my memories. Suddenly, an image flashed through my mind.

No, it was a sound. It was a loud, piercing shriek, as if hundreds of ravens were cawing at the same time. To my side, someone was yelling at me.

—“You... (did something to)... me...”

The one who lay in a pool of blood...[the masked person.]

“In the midst... of the crows... the other... covered in blood...”

“Gray!”

If it wasn’t for my mentor, I might have actually collapsed.

“So that’s the reason why you didn’t want to return to this village.”

The knight shrugged slightly.

“Both you and Add’ll get nothing out of being too kind. If you make her have a dream or something like a mage, maybe all this could be solved.”

“It’s not like I haven’t thought of that,” my mentor answered, while gently supporting me.

“Though, entering the consciousness of someone battling with emotional trauma can alter their minds significantly. ... Besides that, mages have obligations to care for their students.”

“Ha. That’s why I say you’re too kind, nerd.” The knight puckered up his hazy mouth and tsked. “So, after what Gray just described, she was handed over to you?”

“...On the morning of the fourth day, Bersac came to me with an unconscious Gray in his arms. He told me then that this girl was now in my hands, that her corpse had been discovered near the Black Madonna, so nobody would try to

follow us, and that I shouldn't ask about anything else. That way, she would be saved, and I would have gotten a grave keeper of Blackmore Graveyard."

"I see. So you were completely out of the picture during the First Cycle," the knight said, while sighing and scratching his head.

"Though if I just leave it be, it might go the same, unfortunately, I've already boarded this boat. Then again, even if the results are the same, it still can't be helped... On that note, according to what you said, did something happen between Bersac and the villagers? Did Bersac steal Gray over from the villagers while they were planning to perform some sort of ritual on her? Or did another similar incident happen?"

"...I don't know. I didn't ask him back then."

Just as my mentor finished his sentence, the knight suddenly put his a hazy ear up against to the wall of the tunnel.

"...Well, this is bad," he muttered.

"What happened."

"Someone's coming in this direction."

He stared at the darkness.

I stood up nervously.

I held onto the scythe form of Add tightly. Perhaps it was because he cared for me that he stayed in this state. At least I could fight this way. At least I could protect my mentor.

However, my will to fight dissipated when I saw the person who approached.

“...So you’re here,” said a low voice.

My mentor’s magecraft light(*TN: whatever a light summoned by magecraft’s supposed to be called*) illuminated a sturdy figure. Though he was old, he still held a giant axe in one hand with ease.

“Oi, isn’t this too much of a coincidence? This is what you call... Speak of the devil, isn’t it.”

“Mr... Bersac.”

I felt my throat go numb for an instant.

I didn’t know what emotions I was meant to face him with.

In the time I spent at my village, he was the only person who treated me like a human being. Just like Kay had said just then, other people saw me only as the body of King Arthur. At least, he was the only one saw what I was and still raised me as the next grave keeper. He even handed Add, who once belonged to him, to me.

Bersac Blackmore, the inheritor of the Blackmore lineage, and the true grave keeper.

“...There’s an extra one, surprisingly.” As he said that, Bersac narrowed his eyes and stared at the hazy knight. “If you’d excuse my rudeness, who might you be?”

“What a bother, the situation seems to have gotten more complicated. Just like I told these two here, just call me Kay. You don’t have to introduce yourself, I know you incredibly well, and I don’t want to hear another man introduce himself seriously.”

The knight shrugged nonchalantly.

“Kay? As in, Sir Kay?”

“So you’re also going to add the ‘Sir’.”

The knight sighed as if he’d had enough.

Even so, one hand remained on the hilt of his sword, and he did not let down his guard. If he saw Bersac as an enemy, that blade would probably slice through the grave keeper in a flash. Or maybe, like the knight had said, perhaps his silver tongue would be faster than his blade.

Bersac turned to look at the scythe in my hands.

“Did you come from inside Add?”

“Huh, as only can be expected from an old friend. Your guess is close enough. That guy managed to breach the defense mechanism and forced a Spiritual Origin (body) onto me. Either way, that’s how I ended up here, babysitting.”

“.....”

I could not fully process this situation.

I originally thought that there would be bone soldiers, but I had made mental preparations to face the villagers. I never could have thought that the first person we met was him.

My mentor walked forward and stood in front of me as I struggled to figure out what to do.

“Are you our friend, or our enemy, Mr. Bersac?” He asked, carefully.

Extreme tension seemed to crush even the air in the cave.

Just as the tension was about to reach its peak, Bersac turned.

“...Follow me.”

His shoes clomped against the stone, and the sound of powerful footsteps resonated throughout the cave. I had followed after these footsteps for many years, but as I walked forward out of habit, my mentor reached out and stopped me.

“Could you please first answer my question. If the two categories of enemy and friend aren’t appropriate, could you at least first tell us the information you have.”

“You’ve should have guessed it all already.”

“Guesses are not the same as confirmed intelligence. Wasn’t the appearance of Sir Kay just then a surprise to you as well.”

“...Hm.”

Bersac let out a low groan(??).

“...I see, so there has to be some form of basic confirmation. Alright. Right now, both the church and the villagers are looking for Gray.”

“Both of them? Does that mean that the goal of the church differs from the goal of the villagers?”

“Of course.”

Bersac nodded.

“Then, as the grave keeper of Blackmore Graveyard, is your goal also different?”

“To a certain extent, it is the same as the villagers’.”

I felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand straight up.

Was this person my enemy, or my friend.

I had probably spent the most time with this grave keeper than with any other person. Was it possible that this person was also one of those who gave their lives to transform me into a replica of King Arthur? I thought that I might go mad from how tangled the situation was.

“Why are the villagers looking for Gray?”

“Why are you still asking this question at this time, Lord of the Clock Tower.”

His voice sounded incredibly stiff, perhaps because of the question that my mentor just asked.

“I’ve already heard something similar from talking to Sir Kay. He said that the purpose of this village is to transform Gray into a replica of King Arthur’s body. However, I don’t think that this [itself] is their goal. If there was no purpose to creating an identical body, they wouldn’t have retained this will for generations.”

He arranged and ordered the mysteries that had piled up as if he was moving chess pieces.

“I do have a theory. Many additional things have been mixed into the legend of King Arthur. Even the Holy Church and the Clock Tower have their own inputs on the situation, so it’s almost impossible to find out what was part of the original legend... However, there is one very famous part.” My mentor glanced over at Sir Kay, and continued.

“The words ‘the once and future king’ are inscribed on her grave.”

“.....”

“I’m not sure what ‘the once and future king’ is supposed to mean. Usually, I would assume that it was because she was a beloved king. It’s a legend about a wise, just ruler who will

one day reappear to save her people in times of crisis. Similar stories that imply the desire for a savior appear all over the world, and it's only natural, since it's a rather simple wish," he continued, as Bersac remained silent.

Hearing my mentor's words, a strange expression appeared on the knight's face. What emotion did he hide under the hazy face, I wonder?

What sort of comment would someone give on the lord they had served under a thousand years ago? Regardless of whether or not King Arthur was really the hero the legends described, he must have emotions that are difficult to describe.

Because, it'd be like if someone was talking to a person who they'll never get to see again.

No matter what they do, they'll never be able to undo past mistakes, and the tragic result will torment them forever. No matter how many times they come up with alternative words they could have said then or things they could have done, and no matter how many alternate correct answers they came up with, all their efforts are ultimately meaningless. In the end, all they can do is watch everything unfold and fall apart before their eyes. (*TN: There is basically no subject in this entire paragraph originally, so it might make more sense to translate the subject as 'your' or 'one', but that looks weird*)

That was also the reason why Faker was angry, wasn't it.

"Therefore, all the villagers are all hope desperately for the king's return," my mentor remarked.

"The once-promised return of the once and future king."

His whispered words made me inhale sharply.

The once and future king (*TN: alternatively, eternal king*). What a glorious phrase, overflowing with majesty and hope. And yet, those same words were driving me to my doom. After hearing all this information, even a fool like me could anticipate what was to come. I held my fist to my chest.

“...Mr. Bersac,” I said to him.

“I saw... the masked person with those bone soldiers.”

“You saw her?”

Bersac’s expression tightened. Though I had been with him for a very long time, as we would be in the graveyard regardless of rain or shine, I had never seen him have such an expression.

“Who is she? Does she live underground? ...No, is she a replica of King Arthur, like me?”

He did not respond immediately.

Even so, I could not back down now.

“Please tell me, Mr. Bersac.”

“.....”

I could hear the sound of his teeth grinding in the silence.

In the next instant, Bersac whisked around suddenly.

“—Like this!”

He swung his axe.

The heavy mass of iron cut through the air, slicing a couple of strands of my hair, and shattering the bone soldier that had crept up behind me.

The grave keeper pulled his axe from the pile of bones and shrugged. "Now I'm also one of their targets."

"I suppose you'll have to suck it up and deal with it, then."

Kay whistled lightly. Bersac stared at him.

"It's impossible that you didn't notice that. Were you testing me?"

"Of course. It's a lot easier to figure out things like this as quickly as possible, before the relations start getting complicated. Only a masochist or a really cold-blooded person would enjoy being around someone you didn't know was an ally or an enemy."

In other ways, Kay was observing how Bersac would deal with the bone soldiers. The knight, who just had his ear to the wall, looked up.

"We'll have to talk later. I think they heard the sounds just then, and are now scuttling over."

Soon, I also heard that noise. It was the sound of scraping armor and clattering metal, which was unmistakably produced by the army of bone soldiers. My mentor tensed up, while Bersac lifted his axe again.

"Do you not plan on using that sword," Bersac asked the knight.

"Haha, no, I'm only here to babysit, so I'm going to avoid physical labor as much as possible. Though, I'm no amateur. The air has been flowing that way for a while."

The knight turned his head and looked toward the twisting tunnels.

"Sir Kay?"

“Though I’d very much like to forget it, that obnoxious idiot of a court magician did say once that the best tactic is always to escape when possible.”

He turned around and immediately started running.

The sudden escape shocked us all momentarily, but a horde of bone soldiers flooded in immediately from the opposite direction.

“—Gah! Move!”

Bersac slammed his axe onto the cave wall with great force. The extreme might of the blow destabilized the foundation, and dirt clods began crumbling from the walls and raining from the sky from the point of impact. Just as the three bone soldiers in the very front of the group were buried by dirt, we followed after Kay.

*

The bone soldiers who had been disoriented in the collapsing tunnel quickly recovered. They gave up on rescuing their fallen companions, and a couple of them raised their sledgehammers to open a path through the obstructed tunnel. Since they had received orders from their master, they didn’t even consider retreat. They could not tire, so they could only advance.

They knocked at the dirt wall with their iron hammers, not caring if they accidentally hit their fallen companions. Their coordinated movements made them feel like automatons specifically designed for this purpose. However, after a few seconds, their movements stopped.

“...Hmph.”

Someone stuck out a tongue.

“It was hard enough already chasing them there, but I never thought that they would have collapsed the entire tunnel. I

was so close to getting her."

The bone soldiers turned silently.

Perhaps they had some way of judging the power level(?) of the people around them, as their mysterious systems had probably started shooting sparks of confusion.

A woman clothed in pure black stood in the equally dark tunnel. There was a splatter of freckles barely visible on the sides of her nose. Her eyes were the color of tea, and her body seemed out of place for an ascetic nun. The bone soldiers did not know the name of the person whom the surface world called Illumia.

"Hi."

The wink she tossed at them was, of course, ignored.

One of the soldiers charged up to her, and swung its sword. The strike seemed as if it was strong enough to sever the head of someone just by brushing past it.

However, the nun dodged the blade deftly, and performed a backflip.

For a moment, it was as if a crescent moon had risen in the darkness.

The spine of the bone soldier was pierced by her flying kick. With that, the nun leapt up again and performed another gravity-defying backflip (Moonsalto). With the full force of her body, her foot fell upon the other bone soldiers. The instant she hit the ground, she swiftly crouched downward and performed a sweeping kick. She then stomped down on the ribs of the bone soldiers who she had just tripped.

She was alarmingly strong.

Her flexibility and agility resembled that of a carnivorous beast. Her balance could be regarded as the limit of human capability.

In an instant, her limbs were covered in gray armor.

Purple tendrils of electricity emanated from the surface of the armor. Perhaps it was because of the spell had been imbued into it, the old pieces of paper that could be seen between the armor plates. The bone soldiers, which did not react at all to regular attacks, did not revive themselves after being struck with attacks enhanced by the armor.

It was one of the pieces of equipment used by the Executors of the Holy Church.

Its name was the Ash Lock. Usually, it was disguised as regular gloves or boots, but it could transform into a conception weapon if a couple of pieces of paper were slid together. As they are easier to use than Black Keys, the majority of Executors prefer the m. (*TN: That sentence was copied from the description on the wiki.*)

Of course, even though they were easy to use, they still held devastating power.

“Come on. (*TN: This was in English originally*)”

The nun beckoned them forward. She straightened and stood in the stance of a boxer.

The five remaining bone soldiers charged over in a line. There were two each on the left and the right, and another jumped from the back and attacked from above. In order to confuse their opponents, they created subtle differences in how their movements were coordinated, a skill that only an experienced soldier could pull off.

The nun hummed a light tune and took a step forward.

Electricity struck exactly five times.

“Ah, sorry. That may have been overkill.”

After her apology, the skulls of the four soldiers shattered, while the last bone soldier, who had taken an uppercut, hit the ceiling. Fragments of bone rained down.

Illumia impatiently brushed off the pieces that had fallen onto her, and laughed coldly, turning around. Soon, the light of a lantern appeared behind her.

“Aren’t you a bit too slow.”

“...Ha, huh, even if, you say, that,” said the almost spherical priest huffily with one hand braced on the wall as he looked around. Only scattered fragments of bones remained.

“...You did this, right?”

“Isn’t that a pointless question to ask. The very existence of these undead is blasphemy towards the Lord. Dust to dust, and ash to ash. How could I tolerate things that turn against the will of the Lord like these?” The nun said displeasedly.

Of course, that was part of the reason. In the context of regular religion, she was most certainly right. There was hardly any room for rebuttal.

Father Fernando narrowed his eyes.

It was hardly noticeable.

“Alright, time to catch up, Father Fernando.” With a thump, Sister Illumia punched her fist into her palm, and jerked her chin in the direction of the tunnel.

-End of Part 3 of Chapter 1 of Book 7-

Chapter 1, Part 4:

As we advanced, the tunnel became increasingly narrower, and I felt more and more like we were walking down the cavernous maw of a beast. Beads of sweat seeped from my skin in the damp air. Since we had not suffocated, the air must not have been completely stagnant. However, it felt that way with the sweltering heat.

Did this tunnel form naturally...?

I didn't know.

Though there was an entrance into here from the crypt, it was hard to imagine that something as large as this was built in ancient times. Though, it is doubtful to think that no work was done here at all.

There was an air of artificiality here. I didn't know if it was the intent of the creator, but malice seemed to ooze out from this place. For that reason, every time I took a step, I felt a chill down my spine, as if I was being swallowed into someone's internal organs.

Bersac spoke up as we walked in the small underground tunnel.

"...If the goal of the villagers is to sacrifice you, then the goal of the church is to kill you."

"...To kill, me." Though I had guessed as much, I was still rendered speechless when I heard him speak with such certainty.

It was a world that had built itself up around me. It had swallowed up many thoughts and interests and stretched impossibly far, like a spider's web. Somehow, it had become so complex and entangled that nobody could see the whole picture anymore.

However, I think that I could understand it somewhat now.

“The church and the villagers have always watched each other. It’s been this way for a very long time,” Bersac said.

“The sources don’t agree on the relationship between King Arthur and religion. To the central powers of the Holy Church, it is unquestionably heretical. There isn’t a chance that they will approve of her resurrection. Though, having said that, there aren’t people in the Holy Church immoral enough to destroy an entire village because of an incomplete ritual that they don’t know the impact of yet.

“At the same time, in the villagers’ perspective, though they will never give up on their goal, they have no motive to oppose the Church for the sake of a goal they saw almost no hope of achieving. The result was a situation of mutual surveillance, and it’s been this way for centuries. Because of how long it has been, both sides have let down their guard somewhat, making this village seem like an ordinary one at first glance.” (*TN: Bersac says this.*)

“It does feel like something the Holy Church would do,” my mentor concluded briefly.

I also thought vaguely as we advanced in the dark, twisting tunnels. If that was the case, on the [original fourth day] in the First Cycle, did the people who killed me come from the Church?

My mentor’s face dimmed, perhaps because he was contemplating the same question.

“Then who is the masked girl?”

Hearing this question, Bersac bit his lip and responded after a few seconds of silence.

“...Since you’re a Lord, you’re aware of the three elements of human beings, yes?”

“Of course.”

In response to Bersac’s question, my mentor nodded.

“The body, the mind, and the soul. Each part is an indispensable part that constitutes a human being. Simply a pile of proteins and fat will not create a person. A person is only a person when these three elements are bound together,” my mentor said.

I remembered hearing something similar before in class. I think it was when he was commenting on a student’s report. It was the analysis of the existence of human beings from the perspective of magecraft.

“Then that saves me the effort of explaining. You already understand that Gray was the result of an attempt to recreate the body of King Arthur, yes? After many centuries, the village has finally created an irreplaceable fruit of their labor.”

What Bersac said was obvious.

It was exactly like he said. I was an imitation of King Arthur. I had become who I was now ten years ago, an approximation of an ancient hero and a living sacrifice.

If that was the case, then she was—

“The masked girl is the result of a recreation of King Arthur’s mind.”

“Mind...?!” I couldn’t help but exclaim. Was this kind of thing really possible?

I was the body. It was comparable with a pair of identical twins. They would have the same face, the same lips, the

same hands, and the same nails. That was what it was like in terms of physical appearance. Of course, there were also genetic factors, and maybe even other things like gut bacteria.

But what about the mind?

“Can you really recreate that kind of thing?”

“Hey, hey. Isn’t there an example of that right here?” Said a lazy-sounding voice.

“Oh, dearest explorers, your forgetfulness is ever heartless (*TN: I don’t know what this is supposed to mean*),” said the silver knight, shrugging exaggeratedly.

“The mental model of Sir Kay,” my mentor muttered.

The silver knight that was the basis for Add’s personality.

After thinking about it, wasn’t it the same technique used to create the masked girl?

“This technology existed before in the past. The recreation of someone’s mind or body to create what is essentially their doppelgänger is part of the residue of the Age of Gods, or perhaps even the unreachable realm of Fairies.”

“Huh, you even know about this, impressive. Now, there’s copyright or whatever you call it, but it wasn’t there back then. We could replicate whatever we wanted back then. For instance, when I got chosen because of my personality, they never even got my consent.”

The knight laughed grimly.

I was unsettled by his words.

Sir Kay was the personality basis for Add, the scythe in my hands. This, I knew. Though they talked and thought about

different things, some parts of them made me think of them as the same person. Add and the knight were similar, almost like two flowers sprouting from the same branch.

Exactly how similar are they, though?

If Sir Kay's adoptive sister was King Arthur, what did he see me as? ...No, at the end of the day, what did Add see me as? Even thinking of that question made my throat tighten, and I felt an unbearable fear.

"Thank you for your explanation, Sir Kay," Bersac said, bowing his head.

"Because of that, once the body, mind, and soul are united, King Arthur will be revived as the once and future king. At least, the villagers think so," Bersac continued.

"That's strange," my mentor commented.

"Even if the body and the mind are reunited, there is no way to replicate the soul. If they did manage to do so, [it wouldn't just be greater magecraft, but true Third Magic.]"

Magic.

My mentor had mentioned it before during classes at the Clock Tower.

Though magecraft was a part of Mystery, it was within the reach of humans. Because of the advance of technology, the range of it has also become wider. Now, people could dive deep into the ocean, communicate with people in distant places instantly, and even travel to different planets.

However, there are still things that don't exist.

Five such things exist.

The scholars of Mystery call these five impossibilities “magic”.

“Yes, it should be impossible to gather all three. The church never believed that they could, and neither do most of the villagers.”

Bersac agreed with my mentor on this.

That was the inherent problem with recreating a soul. Though this place had succeeded in recreating the body and the mind, the last component was still out of reach.

Next, Bersac turned to him dramatically. “The way to recreate a soul. Don’t you know the answer to that question?”

A couple of seconds of silence followed. How could I know, the silence seemed to say. However, there was a change a few seconds later.

“Could it be...” my mentor moaned.

“Servants...!”

“Though I have never seen them myself, Servants in the Holy Grail War are summoned together with their souls from the Throne of Heroes, right?” Bersac said calmly.

“If that is the case, if the Fifth Holy Grail War begins, and King Arthur is summoned as a servant, the possibility that the three can be united will appear.”

The Holy Grail War.

The war that my mentor had taken part in before. The war which he had once wanted to partake in again.

The war that was rumored to be able to [summon even the souls of heroes], which was an anomaly amongst mages. I

had never thought that ritual in the Far East could be related to this place in that kind of way.

“Of course, the chance for that is not high. The chance that King Arthur will be chosen from the millions of Heroic Spirits is slim to say the least. However, the Church has noticed this possibility. Since they always send overseers over, they are more informed about the Holy Grail War than the Clock Tower is. ...For that reason, they sent people over from their headquarters early on, and thoroughly investigated the village.”

“...Sister Illumia, isn’t it.” The nun that the Church had sent here a couple of years ago. Was she a member of the Holy Church? Bersac gave the answer to this question easily.

“Exactly. Sister Illumia is the illegitimate child of one of the Cardinals.”

The unexpected words took my breath away. “Cardinals... aren’t they high-ranking members of the surface organization?”

“Unfortunately, that kind of identity can’t be disclosed, so she was raised in an orphanage. Though, as an Executor, her abilities are quite outstanding. Usually, they wouldn’t send someone like her to such a remote place... that means, she must be interested in this village. According to some information, rumors say she volunteered to be here.”

The cards on the table were flipped over one by one.

My brain could not keep up with the speed at which things were being revealed. So much information was now swirling around in front of my eyes, to the point that I couldn’t process it all.

What would happen?

What had happened?

Before we arrived in this Second Cycle, had the events played out the same way?

“Oh yes, by the way, a messenger from the church was posing one of the traveling merchants. He seems to have fallen into the hands of the villagers.”

Bersac’s even words made me feel as if I had just taken another blow to the head as I was still reeling from what he had said earlier.

“...H-how.”

Just how many hidden conspiracies surged in this village?

Of course, I didn’t think that this was a regular village. Though it looked that way at a first glance, as one of its members, I thought I was aware how strange this village was, at least to some extent.

However, this was completely outside my realm of imagination.

The place where I had spent most of my life now seemed hopelessly distant. Unknowingly, I stopped walking, and finally realized (it).

“Sir?”

I turned around to see that my mentor had also stopped in his tracks.

“Is that the case.”

As he said that, my mentor bent over.

“Is that, the case...” he covered his face with his hands and muttered again.

“Sir Kay, it’s this, isn’t it.”

“It’s all a trap(*TN: Alternatively, setup*).” My mentor nodded at the shrugging silver knight, and then dramatically walked up to the grave keeper and asked him a question.

“Bersac Blackmore. Who is that behind you? No, [what is it]?”

*

“Waitwaitwaitwait wait, what?!”

A raucous voice resounded in the space.

Many crystal balls floated in the air. At first, there had only been one, but they had kept dividing and increasing like bubbles until they surrounded them.

The sound came from the blond teenager. Innocence and curiosity were spread thickly like butter all over his eyes, which showed the nervousness and truthfulness in his heart. He had been staring at the crystal ball with those eyes.

“Why would it turn out like that? Wasn’t Mr. Bersac Gray’s companion? No, no, what even is the mind of King Arthur?! Ah, No! The crystal ball is too blurry! Do you think I’ll be able to fix it if I hit it at a 30-degree angle with a strengthened karate chop?”

It was Flat Escardos. Needless to say, he was that most notorious teenager in the El-Melloi Classroom. Someone else was next to him.

“What’s going on...!” He moaned.

Small crackles of lightning radiated off of the other unmatched person (?) of the El-Melloi Classroom, Svin Glascheit.

The Magical Energy rippling around the teenager became hostile because of his anger. Though this was inevitable for users of Bestial Magecraft, it was rarely this full of hostility. Clearly, the teenager's emotions were already outside of his own control.

“...Hmph. Is there still a point to watching. The hard work of the actors should be rewarded, so I added more crystal balls. Does that displease the two of you?” Said the young man in response to those howl-like words.

Though he seemed to be a young man, his true age was indiscernible. In the blinking lights, that face, which looked to be that of someone aged around twenty-five, appeared sometimes like that of an ancient sage. Was this a characteristic of Superior Dead Apostles? The only thing that was for sure was his grace and unpredictability.

It was the director of the Atlas Institute.

Zepia Eltnam Atasia. The man who stood in a position above all twelve Lords of the Clock Tower.

Two people confronted one person— or perhaps you could say, [one person] in this strange space.

“As I said earlier, you two cannot interfere with the reenactment. Unfortunately, you are not qualified to do so. After all, you were not in the village back then. Though your acting abilities were quite admirable during the audition, you don't meet even the most basic requirements. It is already a compromise of mine to let you observe from the backstage.”

Zepia's incessant words and unique performance made it difficult to interpret the true meaning of his words. Though, he didn't seem to be lying.

Right now, Lord El-Melloi II and Gray were being struck by something in the crystal. The overwhelming changes in the world of the past—or perhaps you could say the relationships that they had uncovered—were now driving both of them to the brink.

Why wasn't he there with them? Why was he not there to tell him that whatever happened, Svin Glascheit was always going to be their companion? His frustration nearly made his Magical Energy go out of control, and Svin desperately controlled himself as he tried to organize his thoughts.

...Also.

Thought a corner of his mind.

The Atlas Institute, the organization that Zepia belonged to, was sometimes referred to as a “living hell”. If someone stepped into its gates, they will never get to leave. There, they would drown in their own research and dedicate their entire life to the eternal. They were like computers that ran forever in the middle of a cold computing room. It would be a stretch to call them living organisms at all.

For that reason, it was easy to understand why the director of that institution spent so much time wandering outside it. Though the situation in the village was urgent, the utmost care had to be taken either way.

...First of all, what's going on here?

He let his eyes own eyes turn to look at his surroundings. Though there were only a couple meters of distance, it felt like the space stretched out indefinitely to Svin.

Just like how Svin had unusual senses in terms of magecraft, his regular senses were also overwhelmingly sharp(?). Now, those senses were telling him that this space did not follow the laws of physics. If he couldn't figure out the structure of

the location, he had no chance of winning a fight against that man.

...Take your time, he thought, as he swallowed his own dissatisfaction.

He only needed to experience a miserable defeat once—that time with the Seal-Designated Aozaki Touko was enough. She had forced him to see that in this world, not every opponent could be dealt with using Bestial Magecraft. If that was the case, he had to be more careful. He needed to use his goal as a basis to create the conditions for victory and to protect the things which he had to protect.

First, he needed to understand the strange device more.

“Wait, weren’t you in the village back then?” Svin asked in a low voice. “So, does that mean you can also enter that world like my teacher(*TN: I went with ‘my teacher’ for... no good reason actually*) and Miss Gray?”

“Mmhmm. Your analysis is correct, but paradoxes must be avoided. If I entered the world while constantly calculating it, the system would have to recalculate the world, myself included. I would then basically automatically calculate results based on the recalculation. That would be a giant problem. Though some people prefer scripts that contain large amounts of information, there is no way that amount of information could be accommodated in this kind of nested structure. Ahh, I am also looking forward to how Lord El-Melloi II and that grave keeper girl will continue to struggle to reach their goal.”

Half of what he said could not be understood.

In a nutshell, it meant that the one who had the most to do with the current situation, Zepia, could not control what happened in that world. It seemed that regardless of

whether or not what he saw was a simulation or the actual past, they all had the ability to operate even without Zepia's ideas.

"Then, can you bring them back?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot, because that would go against the contract."

"The contract?"

"In the past, the Atlas Institute signed a contract with the previous form of this village. Though I wasn't the person who made the deal, its power is absolute. I must abide by it, including in cases of anomalies such as yours."

...The Contract of Atlas.

He remembered hearing about this somewhere. The seven contracts that the Atlas Institute had sent out in the past. The Atlas Institute would have to accept and fully support any request made by those who held the contract... or something around those lines.

Then, was that the reason why the director of the inescapable Institute of Atlas, was now wandering about?

"....."

He carefully pondered the information in his hands like he was examining a sparkling gem, or like he was sniffing some food.

However basic a problem might be, he needed to start from the same place. The teenager knew this well.

If he didn't want to fail miserably again, he needed to give himself as much of an advantage as possible. It didn't matter how embarrassing it would be, he needed to gather

all the fragments of stars (possibilities) he could, even if it meant he had to kneel on the floor and beg.

...He said that Flat, Sir Kay, and him were anomalies.

He carefully made sure that he did not overinterpret anything.

That means that this person has no way of making sure of whether we would be here, or the events that happened with his teacher and Grey-tan.

He recalled what he had been told of before.

It was said that Zepia spoke almost as if he could predict Lord El-Melloi and Reines' futures. It was the distillation of magecraft that was the direct opposite of that of the Clock Tower, the power to calculate countless yet not infinite futures and to say that reality was just one of many scripts, a simple incarnation of calculation.

Even still, Zepia called the current situation an anomaly?

...If that was the case.

He put his hands behind his back and moved his fingers.

He adjusted the Magical Energy to a wavelength that only Flat could see and used it to talk to him by making the energy take the form of text. (*TN: Idk if the 'wavelength' here is literal or not, because if it is, that opens up a whole new world of 'does Magical Energy travel in waves' and I am not prepared to deal with that.*)

It was something they did quite often when they teamed up.

The message he sent read: analyze this magecraft, take care not to be noticed.

[OK!] Flat gave a reply immediately.

His signal was to rub his fingers together rhythmically. Svin could clearly pick up the smell of the oils on his fingers rubbing together. Not even their teacher, Lord El-Melloi II, had noticed how they communicated with each other through magical energy and smells.

Zepia showed no sign of noticing this either.

Flat could probably go up against the alchemy of the Atlas Institute. The best proof of that was how he managed to break the bounded field in the forest to arrive here. As long as he was given enough time, he could probably fashion a way to take revenge on Zepia.

The problem lay in the timing...

When would this alchemist from the Atlas Institute let down his guard?

This alchemist had probably already seen through all their intentions. The only reason why he did not take any action now was not out of laziness or arrogance, but simply because he thought that Flat and Svin were not sufficiently strong. In his brain, they had probably already lost the fight thousands of times.

If that was the case, what he needed now was not just his own efforts, but also some other key factor.

What might that be?

He thought, as he pondered his own powerlessness.

He felt as if he was a snail that only crawled the length of a finger while its opponent had already ran all the way around the earth. Still, even though he knew there was such an insurmountable difference in their abilities, he had no choice but to continue.

Would it happen when his teacher undid the puzzle? Would it be when the knight does something? Or perhaps would it be something even more surprising than that?

Why did he always have to rely on others?

He felt a pain in his heart, as if it was being pressed with a vise(*TN: or possibly vice?*).

Every expression and sentence from Gray that hid a trace of sadness seemed to cut at his insides. It was the first time that Svin realized that watching other people's movements could bring so much of a burden to his body. He hadn't even felt this much pain when his magic circuits had been awakened.

...Even so.

He would wait, even if it was for an eternity, the thought. Even if it was just to bring her even the tiniest bit of help.

-End of Part 4 of Chapter 1 of Book 7-

Chapter 2, Part 1:

“...Speaking of which, what's that brother of mine doing now, I wonder?” Reines suddenly mumbled to herself as she propped her chin up on one hand.

She was sitting in an office that overlooked the entire campus(*TN: the word in the source text means 'town', but campus makes more sense.*) of the Department of Modern Magecraft (Norwich), which was actually just a single street.

There were mountains of documents piled atop the elegantly-styled rosewood desk.

Some of them included requests from instructors to purchase new catalysts, while others were from other

departments who were asking to borrow the classrooms.

Either way, they were all random boring chores.

Regardless of whether they were friends or enemies, everyone wanted to try and gain something for themselves while the Lord was absent. This pile of papers was, to some extent, the result of their careful efforts. However, it was actually easier for Reines to handle it herself than to have it go through the hands of her adoptive brother first, so this was a welcome opportunity for the young woman.

“Hmph, they even bothered to try and conceal their true intent. If it was my brother, he might have gotten tricked by it.”

Reines signed the paperwork and organized the documents efficiently as she began to think about her brother and his disciple again.

Because that village was had no phone signal coverage, she had no idea what they were up to now. Though Flat and Svin had gone along with them, there was now way to determine whether they would be safe, especially given the current situation.

Gray had always tried to avoid that village before.

Perhaps they were there to face the incident in the past.

...Either way, it wasn't the first time those two had put themselves into danger, she concluded to herself as she yawned.

She picked up the steaming cup of black tea beside her and took a sip. Then, she grabbed a brightly-colored macaron and placed it in her mouth.

“Hmm... Huh, Trimmau?”

“What is it, Miss?” said the mercury maid who stood silently next to her.

“Is this really from the same place as usual? Why doesn’t it taste as good as it used to?”

“My sincerest apologies, Miss. According to the usual test for poison, the ingredients are exactly the same as they used to be.”

“Oh, is that so.”

“I am very sorry that you cannot enjoy the desserts alongside you,” the maid added in response to her master’s displeased expression.

“Are you saying that’s why it tastes different?”

“According to some movies, even if the flavor of something remains the same, the way people perceive its taste will change.”

“Go and forget all the crap Flat taught you.”

“I will see to it,” the maid replied with an innocent expression. Reines gave a light hmph.

Withered leaves swirled about outside the window.

It was already halfway through the month of January.

The Fifth Holy Grail War was about to begin.

She had talked to some informants from the Church privately, and heard that some people had already started summoning Servants. It was also said that the Seal-Designator appointed by the Clock Tower was also nowhere to be found, which was unsurprising. Supposedly, as time went on, the Holy Grail would choose its own Masters, so it wouldn’t be long until all the remaining spots were filled.

Even if her brother flew back from Gray's hometown, he wouldn't be able to make it.

"How terrible...No, how delectable. It's so delectable that I don't even need to say that it is."

She picked up another macaron and ate it, smiling.

"Ah, no matter what tricks my brother pulls, there's no way he can turn back time, is there? He's not a wizard, after all."

There was no way the young woman could have known that the words she uttered happened to coincide with the strange situation her brother was now dealing with.

-End of Part 1 of Chapter 2 of Book 7-

Chapter 2, Part 2:

The air around me was heavy, as if it had solidified.

Ever since we arrived at the summer in the Second Cycle, I felt as if my senses had become sharper. My bodily functions had been forced to operate under the extreme pressure. Ah, even in this hopeless time, my body still had a superficial will to live. I felt a bit discontented with this, but at the same time, I was also somewhat relieved.

My mentor and Bersac stood in front of my eyes.

Both of them had helped me in the past.

"Didn't I already say that I wasn't your enemy?"

Bersac's voice did not waver (*TN: well I've been avoiding using this word, I don't really know why*) in the slightest.

I recalled that he once said that if grave keepers lose their composure, the dead would not be able to rest. Though the times have changed since then, these words were still

etched clearly in my mind. Bersac did not speak much, but every sentence he did say felt like it had a life of its own.

“You are not an enemy. Just as Sir Kay has confirmed,” said my mentor, narrowing his eyes.

“However, I’m not saying that you are simply an ally, either. He probably wanted to confirm this as well. Otherwise, you wouldn’t be so knowledgeable about the state of affairs of the Holy Church.”

“Haha. Don’t go around remembering everything I say so clearly. You remind me of a certain gloomy auxiliary officer (*TN: I’m assuming that Kay’s referring to Agravain here. According to the wiki, his role’s supposed to be the ‘secretary’, but that doesn’t sound quite right. Or it could also be translated as ‘advisor’ or ‘support officer/general’*).”

“I suppose I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“Of course it isn’t a compliment. Though you would be the right man for that job.”

The knight let out a light snort and then looked toward Bersac.

“All of that is to say that you have some sort of fancy connection to outside organizations, don’t you? Possibly with the king of this country— No, it’s called the government in this era, isn’t it.”

My eyes widened in response to these unexpected words.

“The country I lived in back then was quite complicated. There were traitors, traitors of traitors, a court magician that was only there for the fun of it, philandering knights, and a goody-two-shoes (*TN: In a non-derogatory way*) king. It only gets more complicated with the involvement of Rome, and other outer powers. Thanks to that, though, I’ve

gotten sharper. ...Your intel doesn't sound like it comes from a person, and your comments feel incredibly incongruous. It sounds less like an evaluation of someone and more like a report of a giant group of people. Ah, for goodness sake, this stuff always comes just as I'm enjoying myself. (*TN: ???, for the entire paragraph because I just don't know*)."

"....."

Silence descended in the tunnel. The damp, unpleasant air seemed to be dyed with the sound of silence.

"Mr... Bersac?"

The old grave keeper sighed when he heard me call his name.

"I never thought that someone like you would be with them. Though Lord El-Melloi II has a good eye for noticing things (*TN: Things = talent? Character? Virtue?? I don't know*), that means that he is good at political maneuvering. I thought that as long as that Reines girl isn't here, I would be able to remain undetected."

"Are you admitting to it?"

"Some of our distant relatives have contacts in the British government. Because of the disagreements between this village and the Holy Church, they sometimes provide me with convenient information," he confessed calmly.

I do not act in accordance with the government. However, they do not give away information for free, either. I suppose you could say that our goals are the same."

"Can you answer me this time, then. What is your goal?"

"....."

Bersac spoke up after a brief pause.

“I want to delay the revival of King Arthur.”

“Delay, but not prevent.”

“I am not only the grave keeper of Blackmore Graveyard, but also a mage that was raised on this land,” Bersac said.

“Therefore, as the overseer of this place, I must prioritize the peace of this land. If King Arthur awakens from her rest one day in the future, that would be something worth celebrating.”

His serious voice reminded me of the past.

As this man (*TN: The original said ‘male(person)’, I’m not sure why*) had said once, death should be respected, but not feared. The darkness of the abyss of the underworld shall one day swallow all that once lived, and consign them to oblivion. For that reason, all new lives must be worth celebrating. This should be true no matter what evil being it might be.

I didn’t know why, but I really liked how he didn’t directly say that it was the truth.

The training for becoming a grave keeper of Blackmore Graveyard was difficult, and though I lost consciousness many times in the past, I never developed hatred for it. Perhaps this was why.

“It’s not the time for that yet, though. At least, I don’t think so. Therefore, I want Gray to escape because it will help achieve my own wish,” Bersac concluded. Then, tugging at his beard, he turned to face me.

“Aren’t you mad at me?”

“Um... I’m actually more surprised than angry...” I replied, at a loss for words.

It was no wonder.

Too many secrets had already been revealed about the village for me to accept already. Even if someone told me now that the grave keeper that had been taking care of me had ties with the government, I wouldn't know how to react.

Though, I thought of something else.

“Mr. Bersac... You don’t think that I should die... right...”

“Of course not.”

The grave keeper did not look at me when he said that. I wasn’t sure why, but I got the feeling that this was a show of his sincerity. For that reason, I didn’t thank him.

“I see.”

My mentor nodded.

“Since you understand, take the side tunnel. There’s a route there that the villagers don’t even know. It shouldn’t take that much effort to escape from there.”

“...No.”

This time, my mentor shook his head.

“Though I understand your goal, I cannot accept your proposal, because we have already accepted it before.”

“?”

There was no way he could comprehend that sentence. Even if we told him how we returned here, he would probably not be able to understand it.

“Either way, please think of it as Precognition for now.”

“Hm? I have heard of your abilities. Of course, there are other ways of predicting the future besides Mystic Eyes, but...”

“My apologies, but please don’t take my personal abilities into account here. I just happened to get informed of the results.”

Though it looked as if he had calmly accepted it, his voice still sounded stern. Perhaps the conversation touched on something he minded. It seemed that Bersac’s source of information in the government also investigated my mentor’s abilities.

Silence filled the room for a few seconds. As if to break the silence, the knight spoke.

“So what are you planning to do?”

“...Huh?”

I could not answer for a moment. “M-me?”

“Yes, you,” the knight said coldly.

Though he never acted like he was taking things seriously, not even when he was interrogating Bersac just then, I felt that he was now staring at me sincerely. His figure was so blurred it was impossible to see his facial expression, but his feelings were still conveyed to me.

I didn’t know why, but his question reminded me of something. It was almost like the box that was once my only friend.

He was asking me a question.

He had asked me what I planned on doing.

“...I-” The words got stuck in my throat.

I knew that if I said them out loud, there was no going back. This was different from how it usually was. Usually, I would accompany my mentor to dangerous places of my own accord. This time, it was the other way around. If I uttered what I wanted to say, my mentor would have to accompany me into danger. Considering his way of thinking, he would do nothing to stop me, either.

However, I still spoke.

“...I would like to go meet... the other ‘me’. The mind of King Arthur.”

I had probably always wanted to say this.
I had been thinking about this ever since we met not long ago.

“I would like to know... what goes on inside her head, and what she thinks of me. Not what the mind of King Arthur believes in, but what she believes in.”

Though I couldn’t express it very well, I continued.

“I think that, she is the secret of the village, and what I didn’t bring myself to face before. That was why I... had such a rough time in the First Cycle. It was because I cowered instead of facing what I was supposed to face.”

“The First Cycle?”

“Please don’t mind.” My mentor cleared his throat as Bersac frowned, suspicious.

The knight spoke up again.

“Hmph. It’s not a bad idea, but you’ll get killed if you don’t pull it off. Just to be clear, I can’t be relied upon. I’m not one of those idiots who probably even have brains made of muscle who can turn the tide of a battle just because of

their strength. It's probably safer to just escape, like the grave keeper said."

"...I know. I think so as well. But, even so, I still want to meet her."

"She might not think that way. Didn't you two already meet each other? She left first, didn't she. Unless you're looking to get caught by those bone soldiers and to get used by the villagers in that shady ritual, in which case, go ahead."

"...I know. But I still want to meet her."

"Ha, pretty stubborn, aren't you."

The knight shrugged and turned his head.

"Well, what do you think of that, Bersac Blackmore?"

"...There's nothing I can do about it."

The old grave keeper sighed. He raised his wrinkled hand and pointed at me.

"Gray, hold Add up to eye level."

"Huh? But Add's still asleep..."

"That doesn't matter. What's important now is not Add's personality, but its functions as a Mystic Code. The Magic Crests implanted to you were especially altered to fit it, so all you have to do is let the scythe take over, as usual."

"...S-sure."

I raised the scythe as Bersac had instructed, just like what I used to do when I trained.

I held the center of my body as close to the scythe as possible and focused my attention there, removing the boundary between the two and filling the space with [emptiness()].]

“Focus. Making yourself as small as possible is the same as making yourself expand to the extreme. Compress yourself while using your consciousness(yourself) fill up the world.”

I tried my best to suppress a smile, because this was very similar to what my mentor had talked about once in class. Though I had attended classes at the Clock Tower for a while, most of it had not managed to stick. I felt as if I was an idiot who was staring at a giant block of gold but was completely ignorant about its value. ...Even so, I still managed to learn something.

It all seemed like an overly luxurious gift to me.

I took a deep breath.

I focused on the still-sleeping Add.

With a thunk, I touched the handle of the scythe to my forehead. The ice-cold metal made my forehead slightly numb, and the tingling sensation soon spread throughout my whole body, seeping into my skin.

A light shined in my mind.

Suddenly, the light was linked together, and a Milky Way of light spread out above and below me.

“...I see, a path,” I mumbled to myself, unknowingly.

“What a surprise.”

I heard Bersac’s voice.

“I originally planned on convincing you to leave if it failed... I never thought that it would succeed on the first try. It’s only been half a day, so what happened?”

Bersac’s half a day was half a year to me. That was the difference.

Though, that was not all.

“What should I do next?”

“Tell the path of light where you want to go. I don’t know what this place looks like in its entirety, and probably, neither does the church, or the mind of King Arthur. However, that thing is different. It is precisely because it is a lifeless sealing Mystic Code that it has the right to know everything about the graveyard.”

My mentor had once said that graveyards were tiny underworlds.

Perhaps this was the same. This place was Blackmore Graveyard, a sanctum that the living could not enter. When they created the sealing Mystic Code that was Add, they had added the ability to resonate with this sacred place.

The grave keeper referred to Bersac and I, but also to this Mystic Code itself. As I realized this, I continued to focus my consciousness onto the light. There was a great amount of hidden meaning there beyond my grasp.

It was up to me to refine it and to select the relevant information.

The various rays of light pointed out multiple paths.

“Are you alright?”

“I-I’m fine, Sir (*TN: In the original, she just calls him ‘◻◻’, which I’ve translated as ‘mentor’. ‘Sir’ is the English way of doing things, but it isn’t particularly odd to call a man you want to respect ‘sir’. However, in the original context, it would... you know what I think you get my point I can’t be bothered to organize my thoughts coherently).”*

Hearing that word, Bersac frowned. Uh oh. But the situation here was already too complicated for us to explain how we came from the future. Even if we did explain it to him, perhaps it would only make him more confused.

“N-nothing. I know the way, let’s go.” I forced my stiff legs to move and ran forwards. Perhaps it was because of the Tuning, but I felt that my hearing had become sharper. Because of that, I heard what my mentor whispered.

“...Thank you, Sir Kay.”

“What the heck is that supposed to mean?”

“Because you helped me say what I was supposed to have said.”

“Don’t think too much about it. I just thought that it would be better to find someone to make a decision than to waste time arguing about what we should do.”

What my mentor said to Sir Kay made me feel somewhat sad. How much help had I received from others, I thought. A sense of shame and relief swirled in my heart.

In order to ignore this sadness, I stepped forward into the unknown darkness of the underground (*TN: not the underground in the sense of the subway system... or in the sense of people trying to subvert order... I don't know why I decided to add this note... It was just a random thought... Deadlines have not been nice to me this week, and I am too tired to consider if I'm making sense or not*).

-End of Part 2 of Chapter 2 of Book 7-

Chapter 2, Part 3:

Sister Illumia trotted along in the underground tunnel.

The roads beneath this village were complex and intricate. Though she didn't know all of the paths, she was utilizing one she did know to make her way to a path that Gray might take.

As they walked, Father Fernando, who was carrying a lantern and breathing heavily, spoke up.

"Ha... Ugh.. Ha... So Gray did end up... going with that mage to the tunnels, huh?"

"Exactly, Father Fernando." Illumia winked as if she was making a face.

"I...Just can't... Understand. Wasn't she pretty compliant? They didn't tell her the details, but even if she knew, isn't that girl the sort of person who would willingly hand her life over? No, perhaps I should say that, didn't they raise her to be that kind of person?"

"Maybe something happened to make her change her mind."

As she said that, Illumia slowed down slightly.

Father Fernando tilted his chubby head with a suspicious expression.

"Such as, that Lord of the Clock Tower?"

"Filthy mage(s)!"

Illumia's face twisted in spite.

"Though, at least he managed to get that El-Melloi Princess to leave. At least I didn't urge her to leave in vain."

"Sometimes, even I don't know what to make of your strange preferences (fetishes)(*TN: the word used doesn't*

necessarily have sexual connotations...? Interpret it however you like.)."

"All the people there are heretics, so doesn't it make it all the more important if they look pretty or not? Either way, those who do not follow the teachings of the Lord are not worthy of my trust," Illumia proclaimed arrogantly, but with a look of indifference.

The priest frowned as he wiped his head.

"...You are that kind of person."

"I think you're overly sympathetic towards those heretics. There's no need to consider them at all."

"Is that so. Small-town priests like me don't really understand what you higher-ups think."

"Does that include illegitimate children?"

The nun smiled, satisfied, as the priest tried to catch up with her while he dabbed at his face with a handkerchief.

The incongruity between the voluptuous lady and the almost spherical priest made it feel like a scene out of an old horror movie.

Soon, the tunnel widened.

A silhouette appeared in the inky darkness that was enough to hide a mansion.

"Found her—!"

However, as she got a better look at the figure, Illumia blinked (several times in quick succession).

Though she had felt an aura similar to that of Gray's a moment ago, the one who stood there was a completely different person.

The figure, clad in a strange mask and some armor, turned slowly face to her. Many bone soldiers stood behind her. Even in this strange, underground terrain, they extruded a shockingly powerful (*TN: Alternatively, fierce*) aura.

“...And look who we’ve got here.” Nervousness and a will to fight arose in Illumia’s tea-colored eyes.

“We’ve both been in the village for so long, but this is the first time we’ve met, isn’t it.”

“.....”

The masked person did not speak.

However, she stared straight at the nun and the priest.

“I’ve heard a lot about you, [mind of King Arthur]. I’ve heard that you are the master of the shadows of Blackmore Graveyard (*TN: alternatively, the Shadow Master/Owner or like the owner equivalent of a ghostwriter in the sense that she’s the secret owner*). Do you not even want to bother greeting an Executor of the Holy Church?”

The nun seemed to know the true identity of the masked girl.

The masked person was silent for a few moments before she raised one hand.

[Deal with them.]

Her sharp thoughts gave a command.

At that, the bone soldiers protecting the masked girl charged. Two precise lances were thrown at her, but they were deflected by the armor that covered Sister Illumia’s arms at just the right time and angle. She rushed at her

opponent and began launching an attack with fierce punches.

One of the bone soldiers got pierced through immediately, while another had its mandible shattered by the impact of another punch.

“Sensible, aren’t you! I like that!”

The nun’s Ash Lock (*TN: A gauntlet infused with the power of Biblical scriptures for punching blasphemes*) crackled with purple electricity.

The Mystic Code that could strike through all manner of mystic beings made Illumia’s ferocious smile stand out even more. In the instant when she struck down a heretic, she felt the meaning of her life get fulfilled.

“Killing Gray is one option, but it’s not like I can’t deal with you instead. Since this village wants to do some dumb seance to revive King Arthur, if one of you two isn’t there, they would stop, wouldn’t they?”

As she said that, she licked her ruby red lips and prepared to topple the remaining bone soldiers.

However, at that moment, she stopped.

Illumia halted to a sharp stop, turned around, and backhanded the humerus of a bone soldier that had snuck behind her as her eyes widened.

“...What is that.”

Her exclamation(?) fell to the floor of the underground cave.

The body parts of the bone soldiers that Illumia had just pulverized had regenerated, and the bone soldiers stood up once more to slash at her. Even the bone that she had just

backhanded was now visibly regrowing. It was almost like viewing a video in reverse.

Illumia used an uppercut to shatter the mandible of one of her opponents again before distancing herself from them to prevent herself from being surrounded.

“How is this happening? The Mana underground is this thin(*TN: Alternatively, diluted*), so why do these small fries(*TN: 粗, coarse fish*) have so much Magical Energy? Do I have to hit the vitals for these things to die?”

“Sister Illumia... This is because of the... Aboveground...” said Father Fernando hurriedly, as his eyes flitted up and down in panic.

...So it was because of the support from the villagers.

She had thought of this possibility before.

At this moment, there were large amounts of villagers praying to the Black Madonna statue above the surface.

This kind of act was equivalent to offering up their own Magical Energy, and the villagers here had more Od than normal people of the modern era.

For that reason, the bone soldiers underground could regenerate indefinitely. The dead could remain on this earth because they were accepting the prayers and intent of the living, leaving their tracks and slashing their blades.

Sister Illumia dodged the attack in the nick of time again.

“There’s no end to this!”

[Yes, there is,] came the hollow thought.

The masked girl who had only been observing before began to take action.

“...!”

Illumia felt her knees go weak.

It was as if all the energy in her had suddenly disappeared.

The girl was taking all of the Od from the nun to create something. The spirit-like entity that appeared devoured the Od of the villagers and the thin Mana in its surroundings, creating a storm that was not meant to have existed below the ground.

The mana had felt suspiciously thin for a while, was it because...

“Is there something there...?” Groaned Illumia as she manipulated the Magical Energy inside her body. There was no way to tell whether her speculation was true.

Because, in the masked girl’s hands, there was—

*

It was like I was being guided by a shining star.

The light that had once appeared in my ming seemed to be pulling my legs forward, leading me down a path. When we reached a crossroads, my body would move on its own, and I wouldn’t get lost in the dark. I walked as if I was sleepwalking in front of my mentor, the knight, and the grave keeper(Bersac). The journey was surprisingly long, enough to make me realize the true scale of these underground tunnels.

After a while, we arrived at a large, open cavern. There was a structure there. My mentor raised the magecraft light, and illuminated it.

“There’s a temple underground...?”

“Or it could be a grave,” my mentor muttered.

Was this the secret of the village, a corner of the knowledge of the grave keepers that had not yet been given to me?

“Is it, Bersac Blackmore? Do you know anything about this?”

Bersac shook his head.

“No. I’ve only heard that there was a structure underground, but I’ve never seen it before.”

Without further questioning, my mentor stepped into the temple. As soon as we entered, a silhouette appeared in front of us.

“—!”

But it wasn’t a person.

A humanoid statue stood there.

Seeing the same figure that I had seen countless times before made me gasp.

“...There’s a Black Madonna statue here as well.”

The black-dyed statue of the Holy Mother had been placed in a corner of the temple.

My instincts told me that it (*TN: actually the statue was a ‘she’ in the original text but I went with ‘it’ instead because she’s talking about the statue, not the person the statue depicts*) was as old as the temple itself, perhaps even older. The one aboveground might even be a replica of this one.

“I had a hypothesis about this statue when we visited the village last time,” my mentor said, looking up at the Holy Mother.

“Black Madonnas appear all over Europe in a multitude of forms. Most of them are created by fusing with the patron

goddess of the land (*TN: alternatively, the mother goddess of the land*).”

“The patron goddess of the land(*TN: see above*), you said?”

“Most of the patron saints are like this as well. Most religions are somewhat adaptable. When a religion is spread to a new region, not only are its teachings spread, it also maintains a bit of a surplus (buffer) to assimilate local legends and myths. The Black Madonna is an example of this.”

My mentor’s voice resounded in the temple as it would in his lectures.

As if he was praising the statue.

But also, as if he was criticizing it.

“There is a certain enchantress(*TN: alternatively, witch*) considered to be a derivative of a mother goddess. She was mentioned across multiple eras in various different legends, and is probably a result of the fusion of several existing figures(*TN: alternatively, characters*). Sir Kay, Morgan Le Fay is a familiar name to you from the Arthurian Legends in which you appear in, yes? (*TN: Morgan Le Fay has been suggested to draw from various real and mythical women from all over the place, such as Dea Matrona, the Morrígan, Fráech, Circe, and the Empress Matilda .*)”

“What a bothersome teacher you are,” the knight said, shrugging.

Though, rather than being actually bothered, I felt that he just wanted to mock him.

Morgan Le Fay.

I recalled that she was the older sister of King Arthur in Arthurian legends. That meant that this person also had complicated relations with the adoptive older brother of King Arthur (Sir Kay).

My mentor continued without reacting to his comment.

“In Celtic Mythology, a goddess (*TN: the original text said enchantress/witch. The Morrígan are... always goddesses/a single goddess though. At least, wikipedia tells me that*

) known as Morrígan appears frequently. Sometimes she is the queen of the dead, sometimes times she is the goddess of war, and sometimes she appears as the three goddesses of fate. However, she is associated with crows, and frequently transforms into them.”

Crows. (*TN: Crow and raven are basically referred to using the same word in Japanese (and Chinese). This unfortunately means that this makes less sense in English, so for the purposes of this story, please just pretend that ravens and crows are the same thing.*)

Nevermore.

And the grave keepers of Blackmore who led flocks of ravens.

“Ha. Unfortunately, I don’t know much about Morgan. She was a complicated woman. No, actually, most women are pretty complicated.”

The knight answered as if he was telling a story of his past.

How long ago did these events happen from his perspective? Was it days ago? Or was it more than a thousand years ago, like what we saw? Or perhaps, was it a completely different feeling?

“Though, this village is probably related to Morgan. I can see some hints of her from the statue. Hmph, is that why they chose this village.” He smiled a wry smile as he said this.

“It’s very unlikely that she wanted to save her. That person hated the king, and I think she plotted some sort of scheme with Mordred. There wasn’t a need to hold a grudge after her death, but I was already dead then, so I don’t know much about it.”

I knew how the legend of King Arthur ended.

It was the Battle of Camlann. King Arthur defeated the traitorous knight Mordred, but was fatally wounded as a result, and gave the holy sword to the trustworthy knight Bedivere. It is the most famous legend in all of Britain, and there are multiple versions of the story. In one of them, three fairies appeared, and one of them was said to be Morgan.

My mentor shook his head gently.

“I don’t know what Morgan was thinking then. Since you don’t know, I have no way of knowing, either. However, regardless of what she thought, she left behind a spark. The spark was passed down from generation to generation, and after a millennium, something was formed.”

At this point, my mentor paused for a moment.

“The result was Gray.”

“.....”

The topic of conversation had inevitably returned to me.

This time, though, I didn’t feel incredibly surprised.

My mentor turned to look at the old grave keeper.

“Bersac Blackmore. What do you think?”

“The only thing I heard from my predecessor was the situation regarding the rules of the village. Those rules have always been taught to the grave keepers of Blackmore Graveyard, including the one about the Black Madonna.”

“You’re referring to those four rules, right.”

The four rules of the village.

- First, one must pray to the Black Madonna statue upon arrival.
- Second, one must not go out late at night.
- Third, one must not go near the graveyard alone.
- Fourth, a group of many may enter the graveyard, but they must not enter the swamp.

Of course I remembered the rules that I must follow.

My mentor confirmed it out of caution, and Bersac nodded seriously in response.

“Indeed. When someone breaks these rules, I will be notified through the Magic Crests passed down through the grave keepers. This part has not been transplanted to Gray yet.”

“...Ah.”

I covered my right hand.

Though they were both called Magic Crests, and supposedly worked in the same way, the Magic Crests of the grave keepers of Blackmore Graveyard were very different from that of mages. No new magecraft was added to it with each generation, but there would be virtually no rejection, even if it was transplanted to someone like me who was not related by blood. In terms of function, it was basically just used to manipulate Add.

Though I only just got told that it could be used to surveil the village, I didn't find it to be anything worth being surprised about.

However,

“...Sir?”

“There are... Four rules...” my mentor muttered, pressing down on his brow.

“First, you have to pray to the Black Madonna statue. If that’s the case...”

Then, he used his finger to draw a circle in the air.

I had a vague feeling that that was the hope of the village. The slight indent was in the same place as the one in the map of the village. I felt a little surprised that I still remembered such a thing.

“The one about not entering alone basically just means that you have to go along with a grave keeper, right?”

“...Well, you could put it like that, yes,” Bersac agreed.

“...When did this... No, whom would this affect in this situation...” My mentor bent over and fell into a silence.

When my mentor was thinking like this, he hardly reacted to anything. It was as if he locked himself up in a fortress in his mind, pouring all of his intellect and ability into solving a complicated mystery. Although he was not as competent compared to others in terms of magecraft, he was by no means inferior to them in terms of knowledge and thinking ability(*TN: or something around those lines*). Perhaps that would be mocked by others as futile efforts, they were my mentor’s specialty.

Therefore, I didn't disturb him. Bersac and the knight did not say a word, either.

“...Gray.”

After a while, my mentor called out my name.

“I-I'm here.”

“You plan on meeting the mind of King Arthur, yes? ...If that's the case, could you please help me do something?”

Hearing what he had to say next, I could not help but blink (several times in quick succession).

“S-sure, but, is it really okay to leave it to me?”

“You are the most suitable person for the job. Compared to me, it would definitely be more effective you said it. Though it is a risky bet, it's our only option if we want to make any progress.”

I swallowed when I heard my mentor say the word “risky”.

My mentor was frequently involved in dangerous situations, so his ability to notice risk had improved accordingly. How dangerous would the task I was to do have to be in order for my mentor to make such a judgement?

“...I understand.” I still nodded.

No matter what happened, I should not refuse my mentor's request. Even though I didn't know how dangerous it was or why he asked me to do this, there wasn't much to object to. The only thing that I wouldn't be able to forgive myself for would be a failure to help my mentor. Though, if I said that to him, it would probably just make things difficult for him.

Just as I silently made my choice, a light suddenly flashed through the temple.

No, was that really a flash of light? Though it shined, it only existed within our minds.

[However, we knew that ray of light.]

“That’s--!”

Led by our shock, we rushed out of the temple in a panic.

The sight that appeared in front of our eyes was difficult to believe.

-End of Part 3 of Chapter 2 of Book 7-

Chapter 2, Part 4:

Two powers clashed near the temple.

One side, needless to say, was the masked girl and the bone soldiers.

The heavily armored girl looked like a general dominating an ancient battlefield. With the chilling metal mask she wore, she looked like a witch that watched over the entire world from the sky.

However.

The problem lay in the lance in her hands.

It was swathed in dark magical energy, and many thorns extended from it, like the fangs of a wolf. Though the appearance was incredibly different, I had to admit that it was similar to the lance that I was in possession of.

That is to say, it was...

“...A dark, Rhongomyniad.”

My voice trembled.

I never thought that I would see something like this.

No, in a sense, this was an inevitable development. Since I was the body of King Arthur, and she was the mind, it would only make sense if we were both given similar lances.

I heard my mentor swallow.

“...How did this happen?”

“I heard that my ‘lance’ is only a shadow of the original.”

I held my scythe tightly. Though my answer was not an explanation, my mentor appeared to have understood what I meant by it.

“I see. Since it’s a shadow, it wouldn’t be a problem for many of them to exist at once. What a bother.”

As he said that, my mentor surveyed the area. Since she took out the lance, she must be facing off against someone.

The enemy of the masked girl was also someone we knew.

It was the Holy Church, specifically, the nun that had arrived here several years ago. The person who I just got told was the illegitimate daughter of a cardinal.

“...Sister Illumia.”

“Oh, it’s you. I thought you ran off a long time ago. And now you’re here, delivering yourself of your own accord.” Her luscious lips curled upward as the nun smiled.

Strange, ancient-looking armor covered her limbs. With a wave of her hand, she gracefully backhanded the skull of a bone soldier.

However, the bone soldiers didn’t stay down for long.

The bone soldiers rose up one after the other from the area that the nun had just cleared.

It felt as if the more bone soldiers were struck down, the more would rise. Illumia looked somewhat annoyed, perhaps because the situation had been like this for a while. She used her palm to wipe the sweat at her neck and sighed exaggeratedly.

“...Ha, huh. So the magical energy does come from the villagers up there.”

“The villagers?”

“Even though there isn’t much Mana here, as long as there is a path, the villagers will continue sending their Od over. Ah, that’s why those heretics are sinful. They imitate the Lord to do something completely different.”

Illumia pouted and began to move.

Her attack was so outstanding it deserved to be recorded on instruction manuals for boxing.

The arms of the bone soldiers shattered, and their legs went flying. However, they did not back down. And it wasn’t just that, every one of their body parts recovered within seconds of their destruction, and they surged forward to surround Illumia.

“Gah! I’ve had enough of this endless cycle!” She stormed forward with the speed of a gust of wind and ducked to dodge a strike from the bone soldiers beside her as she turned her head.

“Father Fernando!”

“Y-yes, I know!”

The almost spherical priest ducked behind her and took a deep breath. He held onto the crucifix tightly, and began to shout.

(*TN: I know nothing about Christianity, so all of this next bit is thanks to fearboss. It seems to be a conglomeration of various parts from the King James version of the Book of Psalms.*)

“Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together.”

It was the same words I had heard countless times during sermons. Undoubtedly, there was an extraordinary amount of “power” carried in what the priest said.

“None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him, for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever.”

A spell was called forth with his voice.

It was a surge of mystery, inseparable from this land.

The Clock Tower called it [the greatest magecraft base of mankind].

“Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man, though he be in honor, abideth not...”

A transformation happened as he spoke his sacred words.

The bone soldiers who had been preparing to attack around the priest suddenly stopped. Not only that, some of them fell to the ground and immediately turned to dust.

“...he is like the beasts that perish.”

The priest carved a cross in the air and ended his prayer. As he did so, all the bone soldiers around him collapsed, as if they were groveling at the glorious light of God.

“A Baptism Rite...!” My mentor moaned.

It was the only type of magecraft that the Holy Church allowed. My mentor had said that once during a lesson. Though it was the only one, perhaps that was why it was all-powerful.

“It’s a process of using the greatest magecraft base of mankind with the basis of the faith of the Holy church to forcibly purify the surroundings. Though the physical damage is rather low, it becomes incredibly effectual when dealing with spirits or curses. That is how the faith, which they force onto everything, acts as a key to the divine principles.”

“Really...!”

I see, perhaps it could be called all-powerful.

Though they were not many ways of doing it, it wasn’t a problem because everything could be suppressed by the immense power of a single force. Though my mentor had said that the Holy Church did utilize other types of mystery, such as what they called Sacraments (*TN: Okay, so sacraments. A Baptism Rite, 洗禮, is sometimes also called a Baptism Sacrament. But now they’re being framed as separate things, so I guess I’ll go with that*), and though Illumia’s unnatural physical capabilities were also a sign of that, I was still shocked by it.

“It looks as if it’s not enough to influence the Spiritual Cores of the masked one over there or the knight, but those nine soldiers probably won’t try to approach them again. We

might even also experience some problems... (*TN: this is a wildly inaccurate translation.*)"

Just then, I had been told that Sister Illumia was a formidable opponent. She was an Executor sent by the Holy Church, who was a threat to the revival of the heretical king.

However, I never thought that the priest who had always watched over the church would also be a mage.

"...Haha, I thought so. Just this trick alone won't be enough to deal with the lot of them."

As she looked towards the fresh wave of bone soldiers that were flooding in, she nodded in my direction.

"Though, I don't need to deal with the mind of King Arthur, do I? Doesn't it achieve the same purpose if I kill you(the body)?"

"—!"

A beast-like smile appeared on Illumia's face, and she clapped her armored hands together.

Just as I thought I saw her gleaming teeth, she leaped up. Kicking the cave walls to propel herself, she nimbly flew across the walls. Her speed was unbeatable by a beast, much less a human.

"What even is she?!" My mentor muttered, aghast.

I had seen this once, on the Rail Zeppelin.

The prided secret fighting force of the Holy Church that they called the Executors. Their power, like sharpened blades of God, was definitely comparable to that of the mages of the Clock Tower—!

Since Add was still asleep, even normal strengthening was difficult for me. I could not catch her agile movements.

Illumia ran along a complicated path in the darkness, turning herself into a sharpened arrow, and launched herself towards me.

My body automatically began to move.

At least I needed to protect my mentor.

Ah, but fortunately, my mentor's reflexes were not good enough for him to react to this, and the target of this attack was not my mentor, but me.

"What a shame you were born in this village."

Along with her whispered words, the last thing I saw was her gauntlets, which sparked with purple arcs of electricity. However, there was the sound of two hard things clanging against each other.

I doubted what I had heard. It was the sound of Illumia's gauntlets being blocked by Bersac's axe.

"Hmm? I thought you would only stand by and watch."

"I am also, a grave keeper of Blackmore Graveyard," Bersac said with a low voice as the gauntlet clashed against the axe. "The girl I chose to be my successor said she had something to do. Then it's my job to witness it until the end."

"How nice of you."

Illumia smiled.

As she did, her legs transformed into shadows.

Her ankles moved at an inhuman speed towards Bersac's head, missing it by a hair's breadth. With that sort of speed and intensity, it wouldn't be a surprise if the old man's face would split apart as if it was sliced by a knife with that kick.

Even so, Bersac did not waver.

“Go!”

I began to run as if his voice had pushed me forwards.

In the diluted Magical Energy of the cave, I barely managed to strengthen myself to the lowest degree so I could swing my scythe and drive away the bone soldiers. It felt like I was running in water, but I still desperately willed my legs to run and held the scythe tight.

I arrived in front of the masked girl.

[Why, do you persist? (*TN: The last time she said this it was ‘Why, are you here?’, but the phrase used kind of has a double meaning, and this one fits better here*)]

Her thoughts resounded.

Though it was the same thought as before, it felt different to me.

Back then, I had felt only fear. I had been completely ignorant about how this underground cavern was beneath my village, and how someone just like me existed.

“To meet you.”

I managed to dislodge those words from my throat.

[For what purpose?]

“I have something, to ask you,” I stuttered.

As I said this, the bone soldiers did not stop. Because I didn’t have even a tenth of my regular power, I could not wield my scythe the way I used to. I could not cut the bone soldiers apart, instead, I could only stop them from getting closer by knocking them away. Just keeping them occupied alone already took all of my strength.

What a mess I was.

Even so, I still asked my question.

“Are you really the mind of King Arthur?”

[Yes. I am indeed the will (*TN: Alternatively, direction?*) of the King of the past. I am a husk, a remnant. I exist only to preserve this information.]

The information was transmitted through her thoughts.

This alone frightened me. Just as she had said, those thoughts contained her will itself. However... it felt too orderly. It didn't make any sense.

It was as if I was being shown an array of formulas and numbers.

If she was in fact the mind of King Arthur, what was King Arthur like when she lived? Even though she only saved a barren corner of Britain once, she was praised by countless knights as a hero. She was loved by her people, celebrated by bards and poets. Even after a thousand years, she was still the most prominent hero of this nation.

However.

If her mind was the girl in front of me, could a person really be like this? It seemed less like a human and more like something else, like a [divine spirit]...

...No.

I did not come here to think about this.

Therefore, I looked up to ask the question I was here to ask.

“Have you always been here?”

[.....]

Her thoughts were blank.

It was an emotion akin to surprise. As if she had asked me why I had asked this question, of all questions.

“...I.” (TN: there’s nothing of note here I just added this to prevent Google Docs from registering that bit of dialogue as a heading)

I thought at first that it was the sound of the cave breaking apart. However, the masked girl, who had always transmitted her thoughts to me, used her actual voice to speak.

“Ten years ago, I awakened in this place along with you.”

“...Along with, me.”

I was momentarily speechless.

Of course I remembered what happened ten years ago, when my body had started to change, and when I began to become someone else. Back then, I had not been able to accept my own transformation, and had tried to hide away as much as possible. I never thought that she had awakened here then.

If that was the case, that meant that she had lived here, underground, for ten years.

“Then... What do the other villagers make of this?”

“Only the old woman whom they call their leader knows this. You call her Granny, yes? The church has also has its suspicions.”

“.....”

A battle had been waging silently in this village.

The truth, which had been hidden from me for ten years, had finally been uncovered by someone who you could call another me.

“Actually, I think it would be better for you to run. To escape to the ends of the earth.”

Her voice was so low it seemed to encircle the ground beneath my feet.

It made me feel that no matter what she said, it must be the truth. That was how powerful her words felt.

“However, you came back. Unbelievably, you came back. Since you are here, there is only one thing I can do. ...Let me detain you right here.”

The girl slowly raised her hand.

A chill ran down my spine.

Just as I saw the dark Rhongomyniad flash before my eyes, I lifted my scythe.

The immense force of the impact sent me flying. There was no way I could put up a fight against her. I flung through the air at an unusual angle, until my back hit the ground violently. A large amount of Magical Energy was now coursing through my body, and I felt as if all my nerves had just been severed. It felt like something was burning my blood and flesh.

I clenched my teeth.

Though I managed to stand up with the support of my scythe, I knew that my legs were still shaking.

Not only that, a cracking sound emitted from the scythe as if it was breaking apart from the strength of the attack.

I'm not going to be able to hold out for much longer—!

Perhaps because she wanted to keep me alive, she had already shown mercy in her attack.

However, for the scythe form of Add, this was the limit.

Add was still asleep, and he couldn't even change forms, much less activate Rhongomyniad. Due to absorbing the Magical Energy from the dark lance, I barely managed to strengthen my limbs, but it was only to the degree of a normal person.

I swallowed my fear along with the saliva in my mouth.

I raised my head and tried to look the mask in the eye. However, the masked girl did not attack again immediately. Instead, she stood there silently.

“Oi, you there. That's about enough.”

“...And you are?”

The knight that now stood in front of me had a strange expression on his face. No, his face was still blurry. So, I was probably the only person who thought that that was the case.

“Haha, you really don't remember. I can't really blame you. Simply the mind alone is not enough to keep all the memories. Even if the memories are stored, they'll be hard to access. After all, that's the purpose of the body(container). What else would the brain be for? I'm also a mental model, and I can only retain my memories because of that tiny box.”

The knight raised his index finger of the hand that was holding the sword and waved it around in the air(TN:?).

He seemed more like a clown than a knight. He was still a knight, though. Every jocular movement he made made me think of a royal court, for some reason. Raucous, rigid(*TN: Alternatively, stubborn?*), and somewhat nebulous (*TN: Alternatively, imaginary?* *The adjectives here are extremely odd and I think that's because this is the second time it's been translated*)... but also beautiful.

The court of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

“I can’t just let you be. I’m not an empathetic guy, and I already feel uncomfortable just talking to you(*TN: Gahhhh I really wish Sir Kay would talk less he makes my life harder. If his actions seem incoherent then that is entirely my fault.*),” Kay said slowly.

“...Shut it.”

Along with the low voice, Rhongomyniad sliced through the air thrice.

The knight (Sir Kay) did not meet the attack head-on.

He nimbly dodged not only the spear itself, but also the Magical Energy encircling it, once, twice, and thrice. Though it was difficult to effectively perform a counterattack because of the distance between them, the knight didn’t seem to have any intention of seriously fighting back. He only used his sword to parry every once in a while, lazily dealing with the attacks.

At first, it had looked like the masked girl was clearly superior, however, she still did not manage to get close to Kay.

It was the skill that I had seen before when he was fighting the bone soldiers. However, it was not beyond human capabilities. His abilities were not due to some sort of inborn

talent, rather, what he had learned from years of experience on the battlefield.

The knight backed away a couple of steps and knocked on his sword lightly.

“Ugh, if your fighting gets too pretty, it really is disgusting. Though, I’m not bad at the whole stabbing business either, so let me trouble you for a bit longer.”

“Hmph.”

The voice emanating from beneath the mask was not hurried or annoyed.

Even so, she did not move her eyes from the knight, as if there was some sort of invisible force between them. The knight continued to dodge the continuous attacks, avoiding the masked girl’s dark lance as if he was walking on a tightrope. He looked less like he was in a fight and more like he was performing acrobatics.

I also prepared to advance.

Even if I could only take one step, I wanted to walk forwards.

“Gray.”

Someone called out to me.

His thin arm was supporting me.

“...Sir.”

In this three-sided battle, my mentor was definitely the weakest. Even Father Fernando had the power to deal with the bone soldiers. The difference was too obvious. As always, my mentor did not have the ability to contribute anything in a fight.

However, he was not completely powerless.

“Aren’t you here to meet her?”

“...Yes.”

Why were his words able to bring me strength, I wonder.

I took a deep breath, and air flowed into my clogged-up throat. Even if it was the foul air of the underground, I felt that I could continue to fight.

“My name is, Gray!” I shouted.

“What is yours?”

“I do not have a name. I am the mind of the King. Just as you are the body.”

The masked girl’s voice did not show a trace of breathlessness, even though she never stopped waving her spear. It was almost as if this was to show that fighting was normal to her. As if to show that the king she was the mental model of had easily won thousands of battles.

Not even the knight who had fought and died along with the king on the battlefield could make her shed a single drop of sweat. Though he dodged the masked girl’s spear as if he was cheating in a game, she did not tire, while Sir Kay did.

“Your name does not matter. You and I will eventually become one.”

I thought so.

I had already expected this to be her answer.

“If you find it inconvenient, you can call me the Husk King. I am only a third, and I cannot be referred to in parallel to the king. However, I am undoubtedly their king,” the masked girl said, looking to the bone soldiers in the surrounding area.

No, not the masked girl, but the king of the dead— the Husk King.

“Alright, Husk king,” I said, dramatically calling her by that name.

“I am here because I have something to ask you. Since you were also here when I was in the village, I need to ask this question.”

I inhaled deeply.

Then, with all my strength, I asked

“Do you really, of your own will, wish for the revival of King Arthur?”

*

On the other side, sparks flew between Bersac and Sister Illumia.

The grave keeper and the nun. Two people who had assisted each other once, in the village above the surface.

Not only when someone died and they had to hold services. Because the village was small, the two people spoke to each other quite often. Most of the physical work was entrusted to Bersac, and Illumia would sometimes use the firewood that Bersac had collected for warmth. In return, she would occasionally send him baked goods.

The two people had probably expected that they would end up in this situation sooner or later, living out their lives peacefully while thinking of the slaughter that would take place one day.

Illumia found an opening, stepped to one side, and spoke.

“What a surprise. I thought that you only chose that girl (Gray) for her talent. I never thought that you’d help out of friendship at a time like this.”

“...Grave keepers have their own ways,” Bersac responded pithily.

Part of his shirt had already been scorched as a result of their fight. It was the damage done to the grave keeper by the purple electricity emanating from the nun’s Ash Lock(s?).

“Hmph. And you also have connections to the government of this country? Oh, I mean Britain(*TN: I think the word for England is synonymous with the word for the UK, but I’m guessing it’s not just England in this case*), not Wales.”

“...So you know.”

“Of course. What do you think the Holy Church is?”

Even as she spoke in a ridiculing tone, her movements did not stop.

She approached again like a flash of lightning, and threw a large number of fast punches aimed at Bersac’s gut. Next, she turned, and sent a high kick at the side of his head. This series of moves all carried the purple lightning from the Conceptual Weapon, and the bone soldiers in the vicinity were also pulverized.

Evidently, Bersac, who was able to counter all of her attacks, was no ordinary person, either.

He held the giant axe from the middle of the handle, and swung precisely at the nun’s vitals. He carefully observed even tiny changes in her movements, never giving Illumia the chance to gain the high ground. In terms of the amount of individual movements he made, he didn’t even reach half of Illumia’s number, but his efficiency made up for this difference.

For that reason, the two were caught in a stalemate.

—No, that was not the case. Inevitably, the fight advanced to the next stage.

“Then let me show you this!” Bersac said, as he raised the axe to his eye level and spun it.

“Quoth the Raven.”

Along with those words which had some sort of power imbued into them, something appeared above the axe head.

It was a raven.

Illumia could tell that it had no physical form.

It was a low-level spirit, probably summoned using the evocation techniques of the Clock Tower. Although, since it was summoned by a grave keeper of Blackmore Graveyard here, what meaning did it hold?

“■■■■■■■—!”

The raven cawed.

Though the sound was indiscernible by the human ear, the explosive amount of Magical Energy knocked all the bone soldiers to the ground.

“—Hmph!”

Illumia had already escaped.

The purple electricity that burst out from the Ash Lock cleaved through the darkness of the cave, and the shockwave released by the raven was canceled out by the shield of purple light. This was probably her trump card.

Even so, a large crack had formed on the Ash Lock on the nun’s hands. That was the power of the raven’s cry.

“So that’s the magecraft you’ve passed on for generations.”

"Is that how you see it?" Bersac replied coldly. The spirit raven landed on his shoulder and prepared for what was to happen next.

The grave keeper still had not looked towards the girl who was his heir, not for a moment.

*

"Alas!"

Of course, there was a limit to how many bone soldiers could be vanquished with a single Baptism Rite. Though the priest's incantation was impressive, it did not even reach the strength of a spell with a single Count. That entire system of calculating power only mattered to that vile Mages' Association, the priest thought. However, for that reason, he was running frantically around the place.

He kept stumbling and tripping, and the edge of a blade would come at his every once in a while. He could only desperately continue to move his almost spherical body. Illumia was still focused on fighting that grave keeper, and it would take a miracle for the priest to survive.

After so many Baptism Rites he had lost count, he stopped for the first time.

In the process of trying to escape, the priest had unknowingly arrived at the walls of the underground cavern.

Fortunately for him, the bone soldiers chasing him had all begun to retreat, and the priest turned his head to see what they were running from.

"...What?"

Father Fernando noticed it as well.

A strange sound was coming from the wall.

-End of Part 4 of Chapter 2 of Book 7-

Chapter 2, Part 5:

“Do you really wish for the revival of King Arthur of your own will?”

I felt as if I had finally spat something that had been bothering me out.

She did not hesitate in the slightest when she answered.

“Of course,” the masked girl—the Husk King said.

“That is the reason why I have appeared. I am simply the result of data from the mind of King Arthur.”

Had she been created the same way as Sir Kay, to be a mental model?

I felt as if something ice cold had been stabbed into my chest. We had both been created, and she had awoken when I first began to transform. For that reason, I felt as if her words were my thoughts in the past.

“You seem to believe that your own will is important. Do not force your values onto me,” the Husk King said coldly. At the same time, she casually dodged the blade that was swinging towards her.

“—Hmph, not a single opening, huh?” The knight said angrily, shrugging (*TN: Wait what why is he shrugging*).

“Shouldn’t you listen to the opinions of your companions? Since you’re the mind of the king, isn’t that part of your job?”

“That only applies if I have determined that collecting information and comforting the people is worth the time I

will waste."

"You really aren't the same at all, Husk King."

The hazy knight's expression seemed to distort, though I didn't know whether it was in anger, sadness, or some other emotion.

"At least you're not completely beyond salvation. As long as you put money, power, influence, and so on in your list of priorities and fight with other people about your interests, you can still act like a person. That auxiliary officer was always mumbling about numbers like that, and more people ended up using that technique. Ah, that's how it should be. The ideal king, you say? I can't bring myself to laugh at a joke so ridiculous."

"Nonsense!"

The Husk King's lance slashed through the air.

This time, it sliced across the knight's arm.

There was no blood. His Spiritual Core was not stable enough to materialize flesh or blood. However, he suffered as much harm as any human would.

"Sir Kay!"

"...Don't, Gray."

My mentor's voice stopped me as I was about to charge forward.

Even now, the bone soldiers were still preparing to attack. Though most of them had been lured away by Father Fernando earlier, the rest were still enough to overwhelm us. My mentor fired a few weak magic bullets at them, but they were not enough to even stop them from advancing.

For that reason, I made up my mind.

Just before we arrived here, my mentor had asked me to do something. Though it could be dangerous, since she wouldn't listen to what my mentor had to say, I would have to pass the message along.

That was what I had to do know. Even though I had been told that it might be dangerous.

"Please, hear me out!" I shouted.

"Though you might not be able to understand it, but...I've already seen the outside world. I've experienced it myself, for many months."

I pressed a hand to my chest.

In these months, I received so many gifts(*TN: not literally*), to the point that I felt that they would overflow from my heart.

"I always... I always thought that I wouldn't be able to get used to it. Even though I loved all sorts of stories, I always thought that I wouldn't be able to get along with those things. I thought that everyone would hate me as soon as I talked to them. But actually... That wasn't the case."

"What do you mean by this?"

As I had expected, the Husk King's voice carried some confusion. She probably didn't understand what I was talking about. Actually, if someone suddenly started telling me about this in the middle of a fight, I would probably feel disoriented, too.

Even so, I had to continue.

I swallowed, gathered up my bravery, and slowly said what my mentor had asked me to say.

“Tomorrow morning, the villagers will discover a corpse that looks exactly like me.”

“—A corpse?”

“Yes. I don’t know if that will happen this time, but [it did happen before].”

These words had an unexpected impact.

“W-what? No, no. You’re saying... you’ve already been in the outside world for months...”

The masked girl, who had been fighting flawlessly before this, suddenly froze.

Her lance faltered for the first time as she waved it about, and the desperate knight (Sir Kay) took this chance to escape.

Was this what my mentor had intended to achieve?

The Husk King held her lance in one hand and covered her mask with the other. At that moment, the mask made her look almost like a wild beast.

“...Zepia, isn’t it...!” She moaned.

Was she related to that alchemist of the Atlas Institute?

Perhaps because she was deep in thought, all the bone soldiers around her stopped moving. She continued to cry out as if she wanted to crush(TN:?) all the darkness in the cavern.

“That means... this is... no... this is...” Her voice, full of loathing and despair, resounded through the space. “This is... a [reenactment]!?”

“—!”

I knew that was the sound of my mentor holding his breath.

Her reaction immediately spread to the surroundings, not because they had realized what the masked girl meant by her words, but because of the anger that now emanated from her. The emotion was so strong that even Bersac and Illumia turned to look at her.

“Ahh... Is that so. How ridiculous. How humiliating. That makes the two of us less than clowns, and simply puppets (*TN: Alternatively, still lifes?*). No matter how many times we act out this same script, none of this matters,” said the Husk King incessantly, as if she had forgotten that she could only speak to me with her thoughts a while ago.

“You...”

“If that’s the case... There’s no point in this farce anymore. ”

As she said that, she raised the lance in her hands.

Terrifying amounts of Magical Energy began to swirl with the lance at its center, forming a whirlpool of dark power many times the size of the lance itself.

“...Holy lance, removing restraints.”

Those four, simple words made me feel an indescribable amount of fear.

The large amount of Magical Energy completely froze me in place. It wasn’t something that I could withstand. And it wasn’t just me. Nobody here would be able to put up a fight against it. Even though Bersac and Illumia both had outstanding fighting prowess, and Father Fernando and Sir Kay could possibly have trump cards that I had no knowledge of, they were all useless in the face of that lance.

Because, that was a Noble Phantasm, the reason why Heroic Spirits were Heroic Spirits, the extraordinary legends that were recorded onto the history of mankind.

And in that special place that shined at the end of the world — Ah, I knew.

I knew so clearly that I was the person most likely to be able to contend with that “end.”

I held my scythe tightly. However, as I expected, no reaction came from the box that rested inside it. Only a faint amount of Magical Energy came in response.

“It completely backfired...!” I heard my mentor moan.

He had said that it was a risky bet, and this was the result.

A vision of a spinning roulette wheel appeared in front of my eyes. Our chips were our lives, and the skull-headed dealer laughed as he swept them all into his own arms. Was he the Grim Reaper, or perhaps, the Devil?

“Thrust and feast, Thirteen Fangs!”

The whirlpool of Magical Energy felt almost like an underground cyclone. Though it was incredibly small in size, the magnitude of the winds was comparable to that of an actual windstorm. The Magical Energy sliced through the roof of the cavern and began to spin in the opposite direction, slowly converging inside the “lance”.

No matter what we had up our sleeves, it was too late. The words to unleash its name had already come from beneath the mask.

“Rhongo—”

In the instant when she was about to unleash the full power of the Noble Phantasm, I heard a small cracking noise.

We did not make that noise. It didn't come from Bersac and Illumia, who had been fighting before then, or from the large amount of bone soldiers.

It came from a corner of one of the walls of the cavern.

This sound, which was incongruent with the Noble Phantasm that was about to be unleashed, attracted our attention.

Father Fernando stood there, staring blankly at that corner of the wall as a [crack] appeared there.

The crack grew quickly, bringing about a strange rumbling and unexpected phenomenon.

Torrents of water gushed in from it.

“A mountain flood—!”

“Haha, it's 'cause of the swamps nearby, isn't it? The lance's power had already loosened the dirt around here, and it's completely collapsed now, huh?”

More strange noises sounded along with the cheerful laughter.

It didn't just come from one place. Had the breakdown caused a chain reaction? The water rushed in from every direction, filling the cavern. The bone soldiers and the priest were swept away immediately. Faced with the rising waters, the knight beside me suddenly picked me up.

“Sir Kay?”

“Hold on tight! Though swordplay's not my forte, I'm quite confident in my ability to do this! Or you could say that in terms of making a run for it, I'm the best out of all the knights, especially when water's involved. Oi, that mage over there as well, come over here!”

In the short moment before the Noble Phantasm was unleashed, the knight held on to me and jumped into the water. We were swallowed by the violent torrents, and though it was impossible to tell which way was up, the knight never loosened his grip on me. To make sure I didn't get swept away, his body contorted to an unusual position, so strange that I couldn't imagine that a regular person could pull them off.

Before the cold water took my consciousness from me, I thought I heard something.

“—Ihihihi! How troublesome you are, idiot Gray!”

-End of Part 5 of Chapter 2 of Book 7-

Chapter 2, Part 6:

It was said that you could tell a person's personality from their voice.

Some were kind and calm, others were cold and harsh. Multiple factors combined, forming someone's personality. Voices were the same.

If that was the case, then.

“...How surprising.”

The voice what spoke then was probably an exception.

From the world themselves, it seemed as if he was surprised. However, his voice did not contain a trace of emotion, like a cask of wine that had been left to age for too long, causing its colors to be over complex and to blend into a monotonous black.

It was Zepia.

He slowly turned.

“You two were tampering with the parameters of the reenactment just then, yes?”

The two people in question were, of course, the two teenagers.

Flat and Svin. The twin juggernauts of the El-Melloi Classroom. The blond-and-blue-eyed duo.

The two of them were currently in the mysterious space, watching the reenactment with Zepia. Just then, the image of Gray and the others being swallowed by the flood had been displayed through the floating crystal balls.

“—Haha, cat’s out of the bag, huh?”

One of the two, Flat, smiled innocently.

“Think about it, the village’s right next to the swamp, so there’s got to be a water source. And just at that moment, the foundations decided to collapse because it couldn’t withstand the impact of the battle, and a flood happened.... In theory, [there’s nothing out of the ordinary about that kind of coincidence], is there? The structure of that place is pretty unnatural anyway... Let me think, that means that we can use this method to mess with this place that looks like the past, right?”

“...Indeed,” admitted Zepia.

“However, you must first find out the coordinates and precise time the Logos ReAct is operating on for that. Even if you are the abnormalities who can hack into the technology of the Atlas Institute, it is not that easy to discover(calculate) these parameters. My calculations are done by my brain alone, because nothing here can assist you in that.”

Zepia shifted his gaze to the many crystal balls that floated in the air around him.

“All the crystal balls here are connected to that stage. Even in the present moment, the ways in which they are connected are constantly changing. Causes and effects form links with different parameters, and increases to infinity. If you wanted to, in your words, ‘hack’ into it, you must find possible times, causes, and effects, and connect them together. It’s comparable to looking for a single gemstone in an endless desert.”

Perhaps it could also be compared to an endless amount of keyholes.

Many keys were in the space, and though Flat had the ability to forge the key, only one keyhole was correct. There was no way to explain how they found this keyhole through Flat’s talents alone.

That was what Zepia wanted to ask about.

“However, you succeeded. How?”

“I just smelled it,” said Svin in a provocative tone.

Since they had already been found out, there was no point in continuing to hide it.

They had started setting up this spell just then. If Zepia really wanted to know, he would probably easily be able to tell what they were up to. Instead of that, he’d much rather stand proudly and proclaim it himself. He might even get more information that way.

“Though you say they must be calculated, I can smell anything, even weaknesses and flaws. I don’t know if it’s because it’s not meant to be perceived that way, but scent

is the magecraft that my family has developed for generations. And I am the result of their work."

To tell the truth, though, Svin didn't like this about himself.

He silently recalled what had happened when he first met Flat. It wasn't a pleasant memory at all, because both of them saw at once that the other was just as defective and inferior as they were themselves.

—"Sir, this guy smells like an absolute mess! Can I get rid of him?"

That was the first thing that [Svin] had said.

Back then, he had just gotten used to the classroom, and he had thought that this person would probably endanger his teacher, Lord El-Melloi II. It was inevitable that he would think about obliterating him, as he had just arrived at the Clock Tower. Perhaps you could say that it was a perfectly normal thought for a mage. From this angle, he had degraded quite a bit.

Ah, even now, he still did not believe that his original presumptions were wrong. Flat Escardos was an outstanding troublemaker, even among the students of the El-Melloi classroom. His extraordinary talents and personality could not be controlled by anyone.

Svin didn't even know how many problems Flat had caused since then. It went without saying that he was a problem for his teacher, but the other students, including Svin, had all suffered significantly to clean up his problems.

—However, thought Svin.

"...Basically, you're saying that the two of you cooperated to achieve this?" Said Zepia slowly.

“Exactly. I was the one who found the weak point.”

“And I did the intervention! Haha, Svin-kun’s pretty cool, isn’t he? He was also the one who told me that Sir Kay had the ability to hold his breath underwater for days on end!”

Flat raised his hand, and patted his classmate(Svin)’s shoulder vigorously.

He said it as if he was cheering someone on in a sport competition. It was impossible to imagine that the person who said that was actually facing— or perhaps was in the midst of a life-or-death situation. Though mages constantly found themselves in extraordinary situations, perhaps it was because of that that they were unusually sensitive about their own lives.

Just like Svin had once judged, Flat was an extremely twisted person.

At first glance, he just looked like someone who lacked empathy.

For a mage, who was outside the norm by default, perhaps he might even be called a pacifist. However, this teenager could not be summed up in such a mild way. Just in terms of history, the Escardos family, which Flat belonged to, was said to have existed for at least eighteen hundred years. It was impossible for a bloodline that predated even many of the Lord families to produce normal, carefree children.

Even after long years of study in the El-Melloi classroom and a large amount of contact with others, such a deep and fatal deficiency was hard to erase.

—However, thought the two of them.

“...How incredible,” said Zepia, as he looked towards them.

“Please excuse my directness, but the two of you are still far from the rank of Brand. However, finding my weaknesses would be difficult for even a Lord of the Clock Tower.”

He definitely did not underestimate them.

The conclusion made by the director of the Atlas Institute was the result of a precise evaluation of their abilities. Even though they were the prodigies of the El-Melloi classroom, the Mages’ Association was a place where geniuses were gathered through generations of cooperation and inhumane selection methods. There was no way to compete with truly high-ranking figures like the Lords of the three great(*TN: alternatively, noble*) families with incredible talent and an efficient education alone.

“However, if the two of you cooperate, everything becomes different. It is not as simple as addition or multiplication. The way of being itself transforms.”

Zepia slowly steepled his fingers. His hands were as still as a butterfly’s wings, and he closed his eyes. He seemed to be evaluating the teenagers once more.

Flat elbowed his classmate, and smiled.

“After all.”

“We don’t plan on lose again, not even against a Grand puppeteer,” Svin’s aid firmly.

Those words were incredibly arrogant. However, they were well-supported.

Actually, it was only because of their crushing defeat at the Twin Towers of Ilsema, that they had been able to advance further. If this change was not acknowledged, was there any purpose of improving at all, as mages of extraordinary talent?

—And then.

For that reason, Zepia mused.

“Confident, aren’t you?” The Dead Apostle’s lips showed the vaguest hint of emotion.

“If that is the case, I was mistaken. The past is a stage, they are the actors, and I thought that I was the playwright that was here to simply observe the play. Ah, yes, there are often many playwrights in a troupe. Only through mutual consultation can the story truly soar to a realm beyond what a single person can achieve. To think that I forgot this kind of common sense.”

A strange color began to spread on Zepia’s face.

Zepia slowly pondered his “color”, which had finally returned to him after decades, or perhaps centuries, and shifted his gaze back to the teenagers.

He straightened his posture, as if he was a grand master who had realized that his opponent was more than a neophyte after multiple chess moves.

“Come on, my foes. Who shall this story be composed by?”

The teenagers who had just been named as foes swallowed at the same time.

-End of Part 6 of Chapter 2 of Book 7-

Chapter 3, Part 1:

◆ 第三章 ◆



—Scents were often present in my dreams. The soft smell of boiled potatoes told me that it was around more than ten years ago.

Back then, mashed potatoes were a regular part of my family's dinner, and I often complained because I had grown sick of eating it. My father was usually the one cooking at

the time, and he spoiled me more than my mother did. For that reason, he spent a lot of effort thinking of what to cook, and even especially ordered ingredients for Chinese and Japanese food from the traveling merchants. The two of us had then attempted to cook the dishes according to the second-hand recipes in our hands.

I recalled tasting a dish so spicy I had ran circles around the yard with my father, making my mother laugh. Transforming into King Arthur's body, being revered by the villagers, and having everything in my life controlled was after that.

...Ah, yes.

That was why I had always thought it was my own fault.

My fault that I had become the body that was revered by my parents and the villagers.

Because of that, after I was chosen by Bersac to become a grave keeper, I tried to busy myself with that job as much as possible after I could freely enter the graveyard.

Though I hated the dead, it was better than being worshipped by the living. When I faced the spirits that would appear periodically, though I felt terror from the depths of my heart, I also felt somewhat comforted. Comforted because even if I died, and became one of them, it would be better than my life in this village.

I thought of this...but I never died.

There were too many contradictions.

Even when I arrived in London and became my mentor's disciple, I had not been able to get over all the complicated mess of interpersonal relations and how I had been served with amazingly delicious tea and desserts.

For that reason, meeting the Husk King was incredibly important to me.

I wanted to know how she regarded her own existence. The answer that I received was so clear and unambiguous that it struck me with an indescribably amount of force.

What should I do?

Should I obediently give up my body? No, I didn't think so. If it was the me of the past, I might have made this choice easily. However, now... Someone would definitely feel sad if I chose that option.

If that was the case, then.

If that was the case...

-End of Part 1 of Chapter 3 of Book 7-

Chapter 3, Part 2:

A low moan sounded in the church above the surface, beneath the shattered panes of stained glass.

“...What happened?”

The old woman's voice shook.

It seemed to be the first time the other villagers had heard the old woman make such a sound. A slight uneasiness began to spread.

“What happened to you, mind of the King (*TN: Alternatively, King of the mind?*)?”

The old woman spread her arms and pleaded as she stood at the altar.

However, her hands fell in dismay, perhaps because she received no answer.

Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachtani (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me)? She looked almost like a martyr from millennia ago (*TN: That was not dialogue. Idk whether this refers to specifically Jesus or very old martyrs in general*).

“Grandmother, what happened?” A villager asked.

Among them, many were still collapsed on the ground, unable to stand up.

This was because they had given too much of their Od to the Husk King beneath the ground. Though she hadn’t unleashed it, simply manifesting her Noble Phantasm had great costs. Now, around a quarter of the villagers were rendered immobile.

“...Contact with the mind of the King has been broken.”

“The contact with the—”

“She became agitated after meeting Gray, and seemed to have wanted to unleash her Noble Phantasm...”

The old woman was not an actual mage. Though she could sense the state of the Husk King through magecraft passed down through generations, she could not discern the precise situation. Therefore, she was completely oblivious to their conversation.

“No, the mind of the King would never get into any trouble. It’s just the connection being severed. The flood could never harm her. Since there was a flood there, perhaps [the other problem can also be solved.]”

After she uttered those cryptic words, the old woman clenched her withered hands.

“...However. Gray managed to escape. This matter must not be ignored.”

In response to the old woman’s worries, someone gave an obvious answer.

“Can’t we just catch her and bring her back? The king is only a third of herself, so it’s only normal for her to be confused. Therefore, we must help her resolve her worries.”

“Magdalena, yes?”

It was Gray’s mother.

She stroked her long hair with her fingers and smiled. An indescribable light shone in her unfocused eyes.

“Please let me handle it. I am the person who has been with the body of King Arthur the longest, after all,” the woman said, quietly.

“Yes, I know better than anyone... No matter how we chase her, in the end, that child will never choose to run away.”

As if to confirm what the mother had just said, the old woman narrowed her eyes, burying them in a pile of wrinkles.

“I see. Alright, I shall leave it to you.”

“Thank you very much.” Gray’s mother bowed her head.

“Prepare to search the mountain,” the old woman ordered. “I allow you all to approach the swamp. Though, from the look of the flood, the Bounded Field has probably already been destroyed.”

“Understood.”

“Since the Holy Church has already declared themselves to be an enemy of ours, we do not have any time to waste.”

Next, the old woman took out a curved dagger.

It looked considerably old, and some parts of the metal engravings had been damaged. Perhaps because it was cared for well, or maybe for some other reason, the gold shone as if it was proud to say it still retained its glory.

“This is... Ah, yes.”

“Erosion,” said the old woman, naming the dagger (*TN: Also called ‘Erosion: Penetrating Blade of Gold’, but I think that’s a tad excessive*).

“Neither the Church nor the grave keepers know of its existence. It is our treasured Mystic Code, given to us by our Holy Mother for the purpose of reviving King Arthur.”

The old woman stared at the dagger, transfixed, as if to say that she was born for this very reason.

According to what she said, the village had been divided into two factions, each one keeping its own secrets.

One was the Blackmores, the lineage of mages that guided souls and guarded the graveyard, from thousands of years ago.

The other, was the group who wished for King Arthur’s return. The devotees of the Black Madonna and King Arthur, such as the old woman who had inherited the dagger.

Actually, most villagers didn’t belong to either faction. Though most of the villagers were focused on the resurrection of King Arthur now, some of them would be chosen periodically to be grave keepers, and others were fanatical believers in the Black Madonna. The role of the grave keepers had never been at odds with the revival of

King Arthur, but both sides kept secrets from and held grudges against each other.

And then, one day, the Holy Church also joined, assimilating the Black Madonna with the Holy Mother of their own religion, and used that as a reason to take root here.

Though it looked as if they got along harmoniously, they watched each other in private.

For this village of less than a hundred people, this was far too much history, to the point that some people might tire of it.

“This blade was forged to cut through not only flesh, but also the spaces between the body, mind, and the soul. When used for sacrifices, our Holy Mother was said to have used this dagger to direct the sacrifice’s heart. According to legend, it can also transform into a scythe, or even a sword,” the old woman said shakily as she gazed at the dagger.

“After we have captured Gray, all we need to do is stab her with this dagger. Then, her pitiful mind and soul can be briefly separated from her body. Next, we shall bind the mind of the King to the body as much as possible. For the soul, all we can do is wait for that Holy Grail War. We must live until that time. Ah, it doesn’t matter how many Heroic Spirits there are, as long as the mind and body are reunited here, the soul of the King must be summoned! Such a degree of luck will definitely favor our king!”

The old woman’s laughter did not cease.

Gray’s mother stared at the dagger with a mesmerized smile, and the other villagers were still collapsed on the floor.

The Black Madonna still stared down at them with the same unchanging expression it always had.

*

I coughed, expelling water from my throat.

Though I felt cold, the wind that blew across my face told me that it was only caused by my body temperature.

I was in the middle of a lush forest.

Though the sun had not risen yet, there was a faint glow in the horizon. It appeared that we had spent quite some time underground. It would probably take a few more minutes for me to fully register the fact that I was outside.

...I seemed to have had a dream.

I couldn't remember what it was about, but it felt like a nostalgic one.

Just as I thought about this, someone spoke to me.

"Huh, you're awake."

An unnaturally hazy face stared down at me. I recalled that it was because he said he had not completely materialized, and blinked.

"...Sir Kay."

"Ah, it's good that you remember my name. You choked on a lot of water, after all. According to experience, if you don't breathe for long enough, your mind goes all funny. Ah, if I were to use the knowledge of this era, it's called brain damage, isn't it?"

He sat down on the ground, laughing, and not caring if his armor got dirty at all (*TN: I highly doubt keeping his armor clean is high up on his list of priorities at this point in time, but never mind*).

In the light of the early morning, he looked incredibly mysterious. No, why was I thinking of mysteriousness? He was a knight from the distant past that had been summoned to the present. That was Mystery, the real thing. It was the first time this truth sank in.

As I coughed, I felt my consciousness gradually return to me. I sat up hastily.

“...M-my mentor! Where is he!?”

“Look over there.”

I only realized that my mentor was lying there when I looked in the direction the knight jerked his chin in.

His long, wet hair was spread out on the ground around him, and his already unhealthy-looking face was even paler. Water was dripping from the hem of his suit.

“Sir!”

“That guy’s(*TN: that’s not the right word, think of maybe a 7 on a scale of ‘person’ to ‘bastard’*) got even worse stamina than you do. He’s out cold, though, so he probably didn’t choke on that much water.”

I hurried over to him, and extended a hand toward his face.

The moment I felt an exhale escape his lips, relief surged forth from the bottom of my heart, and I collapsed beside him. ...How strange, I thought. When I first arrived in London, I had thought that he was such an annoying person. How did I end up feeling this way?

Though my brain was still not working properly, I knew the answer straight away.

It was because I had changed, and I was slightly happy as I thought of that.

Because even though this face belonged to someone else, the mind(heart) that never stopped growing and changing was undoubtedly my own. Even though eternity does not exist in this world, it was still true that it would continue to change forever. If that was the case, I suppose that one day, I would be able to stand up in a place where nobody else was, because the person formed through the accumulated change was my true self.

That same person told me of my own existence. I exhaled deeply.

“Pleased? —Take this,” the knight said, as he handed my scythe to me.

“...T-Thank you.”

“This is my current vessel, after all. Take good care of it.”

“You saved us, right?”

“Even for me, trying to swim while lugging two people around is absolutely exhausting. You’d better thank me properly. After I managed to swim up, I found a tunnel in the back that leads here. I don’t know if the flood loosened the dirt, but the moment I got out, it collapsed.”

The hazy knight irritatedly fanned at his wet hair with his hands.

He had probably swam up here with his armor on. Though he was a spiritual being(?), and his armor wouldn’t necessarily retain its original weight, it was probably physically impossible to escape from a flood while dragging two people along. On top of that, he had found my scythe. I couldn’t imagine how he was able to carry it. I didn’t think

that was a question that could be answered by simply attributing it to the fact that he was a Heroic Spirit. Amazingly, though, I could accept it.

Before I lost my consciousness, I had felt myself get picked up by an arm.

The motions with which that arm sliced through the water felt almost like they came from a different dimension. I got the feeling that I was holding onto a dolphin instead of an arm.

“The only thing I’ve ever been good at is swimming. Though I say that, this kind of skill’s got nothing to do with the reputation I had as a knight. Thanks to that, I used to constantly get comments from my colleagues saying how weird I was.”

True, it didn’t seem like it would further his reputation.

However, I felt like it suited this mental model(person) very well, more than skill in sword fighting or magecraft would. I didn’t know why, but it made me feel a sense of relief.

“That old guy swam off on his own to another tunnel, though.”

“Mr. Bersac...” The name of the person who was not here came out of my mouth.

“...Um, what about the Husk King?”

“Who knows. She isn’t someone who’ll get affected by that much water anyway.”

That was true. Even I would probably be able to get out of there alive if I was able to strengthen myself properly.

Finally, I had recovered enough to examine my surroundings.

I was surrounded by trees on all sides. There was also a thin veil of fog. However, since I had lived here for many years, I still had a basic grasp of where I was.

“We’re probably a little bit up the mountain from the village. I think we’re a bit further than the other end of the swamp.”

“Huh, the tunnel goes pretty far then, doesn’t it?”

“That’s... probably the case, yes. That cavern was pretty large, after all.”

In retrospect, it was a miracle that the entire ground didn’t collapse on us when she almost unleashed the dark Rhongomyniad. I couldn’t help but shudder at that thought. I didn’t know if it was due to fear or my body temperature.

Just as I sank into thought, I felt something touch my damp hood, and I looked up in curiosity. Suddenly, the hand began to move back and forth across my head.

“Ah! Please don’t, my hair will get messy!”

“Haha.”

The knight retracted his hand and smiled, as if he just saw something funny. “You aren’t like that guy at all, but maybe you’ll get along well with Gareth. You’re sort of related to that bunch anyway.”

I had a strange impression of that name.

“That’s the... (of the Round Table)”

“You don’t need to know,” the knight said, feigning ignorance and looking away.

At that moment, there came a faint groaning noise.

My mentor was lying on the ground, looking weakly at us. I felt my body temperature rise instantly. Maybe it really did increase by a couple of degrees. I shouted as if I had finally dislodged something from my throat (TN: How many times has this been used as a metaphor so far? I don't know).

“Sir!”

“...Gray?”

“Yes, I’m here!”

Seeing my mentor look up at me, I suddenly wanted to cry.

Why did I become such a crybaby? I held tightly onto his hand. I was so glad that my hood was on, I thought. If I cried right now, it would probably bother him. Though I knew that, I still felt the back of my throat heat up uncontrollably.

“S-sir...”

“...What. Don’t look at me with such a weird expression.”

My mentor glanced at his fingers which were being tightly held, and smiled wryly.

Next, he gathered up his wet hair and sat up. He took off his dripping suit jacket, and carefully extracted his box of cigars from the pocket.

He carefully wiped water off its surface, and then opened it. It seemed that the container was quite waterproof, as the inside was still dry. It could also have been the effect of some kind of magecraft.

He took out a cigar with one hand and held a knife in the other.

Perhaps because of the cold, my mentor’s fingers were frozen, so I gently took the knife from him and helped him

cut off the tip. However, the matches got wet, so my mentor had to snap in order to start a fire.

Smoke wreathed around the cigar as it slowly burnt.

“.....”

I felt as if it had been ages since I had smelled its scent.

When I first arrived in London, I didn’t like the smell very much. Even now, if someone else was smoking, I would have thought that it was unpleasant, though I wouldn’t have much else to say about it. However, whenever my mentor lit a cigar, I got a strange feeling, as if I was wrapped up in my favorite blanket.

“So we were washed up— No, you swam to the swamp area, yes?”

“You’d better thank me properly,” the knight said, somewhat proudly. “What do you plan on doing?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I’m asking what we should do next, of course. We just barely managed to escape. It took a fluke on top of a fluke to get us out there alive. If that same thing happened a hundred more times, we’d probably die a hundred times,” said the knight, casually mentioning certain death.

The air with which he said those words reminded me of ancient battlefields. The only reason why he could say something like that was because he was a true warrior of this land.

“Life is the most valuable thing to human beings, after all. It’s not too late to run, is it?”

“...If you assume that escape is even possible,” my mentor said. “I still don’t think this is actually the past. If it isn’t, do

you think that there'll be an 'outside' to this village at all?"

"You mean, nothing will be outside this village? Sounds like something out of a fairy tale."

"In the end, the person making this choice isn't me, anyway." After he said that, my mentor exhaled a puff of smoke and looked toward me.

"Huh?"

"Gray, what do you think?" He asked. "I've asked you something similar before. This is your case, after all."

"....."

My case.

This was the first time someone had said something like that to me. Though I had been involved in multiple cases along with my mentor before, I was only ever my mentor's disciple, and nothing else.

However, this was different. This was a case that happened in my hometown, and a sequel to the first case. It was the reason why I had left my village, and a truth that I had to face.

The underground temple. Another Black Madonna. The revival of King Arthur.

And, most importantly, the mind of King Arthur— the Husk King.

Or perhaps, another me.

"She didn't listen to what I had to say," I confessed quietly.

It wasn't enough. My words and my experiences were not enough to move her.

I needed to talk to her in order to know the truth, and in order to know what I was. However, my words were too shallow, and I hadn't been able to reach the Husk King's heart.

It was all because I was too immature.

I hopelessly pondered my own uselessness, and how much danger I had brought upon the people around me.

"But, if you would allow it, Sir, I still want to meet her again."

"...Then, as your teacher, I shall have to assist you. If I denied my disciple's requests, it would damage the reputation of the El-Melloi name."

"...Thank you!"

I nodded as hard as I could.

I knew that what he said about the El-Melloi name was just an excuse, but because of that, my mentor's encouragement was fully conveyed to me.

"You weren't the only one whose words fell on deaf ears. If I didn't make you say all those unnecessary things, she wouldn't have unleashed her Noble Phantasm either."

"Well..."

I recalled the Husk King's furious face when I had passed on my mentor's message.

Actually, before that point, I could feel that she had been showing some mercy. Even though she wanted to restrain me, it didn't seem like she wanted to hurt me excessively.

If that was the case, what part of my mentor's words had she not been able to take?

“...I don’t know why, but the Husk King seems to know what a reenactment is,” I muttered. “If that’s the case, she probably won’t do the same things she did during the First Cycle.”

The goal right in front of our eyes was to solve the case of the past.

—“Find the mystery that you must solve,” Zepia had said.

We had thought that this was the way that we could escape this Second Cycle, or perhaps a clue. However, because of the events that had just played out, our plans had drastically deviated from that.

However.

“Perhaps her reaction is the key,” my mentor muttered.

“The key?”

“I’m not sure, either, but there’s a sense of...dissonance. I prepared the message to utilize the dissonance as much as possible, but I never thought she would react that violently. I’m incredibly ashamed of myself. ...I was so close to making her listen.”

My mentor hunched over in thought.

I knew that he would often stay this way for a long time. Once, he had forgotten to eat for an entire day when he was writing a thesis, and ended up having to drag himself out of his room in a complete state of disarray.

However, before he could sink into thought, someone spoke.

“—Can I interrupt you for a second?”

“What?”

“Nothing, really. I’ve just noticed something. Doesn’t that part look funny?”

The knight pointed in a direction.

It was a patch of ground in the forest. It seemed to be frequented by wild animals, so the grass had parted to reveal some soil. Looking at that otherwise unassuming bit of dirt, I also sensed that something was off.

“...This is...”

I extended my hand, and the moist ground in front of us sank slightly.

My mentor noticed it as well, and frowned.

“Are those human footprints?”

“...Probably.”

I bent over and inspected the ground at an angle.

It was a hunting technique that Bersac had taught me. Footprints were difficult to examine from a standing position, so you needed to bend over in order to discern the state and direction of the footprints.

From the size of the prints, I could tell that they were probably left by a man. He was wearing leather shoes, unlike the villagers, and his steps were uneven, as if he wasn’t used to walking on mountain roads.

“We’re close to the swamp now, and according to the rules, the villagers won’t approach this area.”

I nodded in response to my mentor’s words. This wasn’t a place where people would usually leave their footprints, so there must be some sort of meaning to it.

“...Let’s take a look,” I said naturally, as a strange feeling rose in my heart.

If such a thing like the threads of fate did indeed exist, it was a feeling as if we had just been captured by lines that hung from the sky.

Though we were not puppets, our destination had just been decided by those threads, I thought, though I didn’t know why I was so certain.

*

A voice rang out from somewhere.

“—If a coincidence happens once, it will naturally become interlocked with the next coincidence. When luck deviates, some kind of counterproductive effect is bound to occur before the possibility is closed off. Ah, this has nothing to do with cliché ideas of whether someone is lucky or not. It’s simply the phenomenon of how a pendulum is more prone to extremes after a force is applied to it before it returns to its natural resting place. (*TN: ??*)”

The emotionless voice explained the situation as if it were a lecture.

Presently, they were looking down at how the events had unfolded. Lord El-Melloi II and Gray had entered the forest, and had coincidentally found the footprints. They had seen all of this.

“Let me think... You’re trying to say that this is karma(*TN: Alternatively, a cause-and-effect relationship*), right? It’s a pretty important concept in eastern thought, isn’t it? Something around the lines of if you help a crane in the morning, it’ll come give you better gear in video games at night!”

It was the voice of a teenager.

There wasn't a hint of fear in the teenager's voice, to the point where someone might wonder how much he actually understood about his situation. In response to his words, the classmate sitting beside him was speechless momentarily before he answered in as calm of a voice as he could muster.

"Flat, we're not having class right now."

"But Le Chien-kun, isn't it better to ask questions when you still have the chance? Aren't things like whether you should spread butter or jam on bread the key?"

"How is that even related!?" He yelled, gritting his teeth like an angry beast. His classmate's response still carried some confusion.

"Wait, are they alright because they popped out into the swamp from beneath the ground? Or is that place outside of the bounded field...?"

They had passed that same bounded field, and had ended up in this space as a result.

"Just watch," a voice said in response to his question.

"Let us see how the vortex has changed because of your intervention, and let us find out what awaits them there, at the end of the change."

-End of Part 2 of Chapter 3 of Book 7-

Chapter 3, Part 3:

We walked for about ten minutes along the footprints, and a small hut hidden in the foliage appeared.

"Ha. I didn't know that there'd be something like this here," the knight said, shocked.

It was a small, scrappily-built hut, a bit smaller than the one Bersac lived in. Perhaps because it was in the middle of the forest, about half of the wood on the outside had rotted, to the point where it was surprising that it hadn't collapsed yet.

"It seems that the decaying walls have been reinforced with some kind of magecraft," my mentor said, gingerly touching the wall.

"Magecraft?"

"...It might've been placed here intentionally for us to find," he muttered, and nodded to confirm what I had just said.

We cautiously opened the door and entered the hut.

My mentor stepped gently onto the decaying wooden floor and looked around, making sure that nothing like the bone soldiers we had encountered earlier would attack us from the shadows. I was also on high alert, keeping my eyes wide open and staying by my mentor's side.

In the entrance area, there was a regular-looking set of tables and chairs. However, as we stepped further into the room, we discovered something that made me widen my eyes in shock.

"What's that?"

The voice of the knight came from behind me.

An entire wall had been covered by a large amount of notes and pictures, which had been connected by strings of assorted colors. The combination looked almost like the patterns of Magic Circuits (*TN: Actually, 'the patterns of magecraft/magecraft patterns' If you know what that is, please tell me.*) My mentor blinked, and said a name.

“This is, an evidence board (*TN: also called a conspiracy board, a crazy wall, or a murder map. Wait. Crazy wall? Murder map?? What?*).”

“An evidence board?”

“It appears a lot in crime dramas. It’s a tool for visually organizing thoughts, ideas, and complex events through notes and photographs by connecting related pieces of data.”

Hearing his explanation, I somewhat recalled seeing one somewhere. No dust had gathered on top of the photos or the string, so it hadn’t been long since this was made.

Because I heard that it was a tool for organizing thoughts, I felt as if I was looking through someone else’s brain.

The photos that had been pinned up showed the village from various angles. There were wide shots of the Black Madonna and the graveyard, each with notes that looked like records of observations. The strings were probably also related to the observations somehow.

My mentor’s gaze lingered on one of the lines of notes.

“What is it?”

“...Nothing.” As he said that, he turned his gaze to one of the patterns drawn on the edge of the notes. “It seems that the person who made this evidence board was also looking into the three essential parts of a human being.”

“So, the body, the mind, and the soul...”

The true form of the masked girl and I, as well as the reason why we had been created.

“It follows the theory that I’ve been thinking about for a while. ...No, it’s a lot more detailed than my theory. This

person's research goes deeper than just figuring out how Gray is the body of King Arthur and how the mind might exist underground."

My mentor traced his fingers along the strings, as if he was trying to imitate (*TN: Actually the word used here is 'trace'*) the mind of the person who had created this evidence board.

I didn't know why, but I felt a flurry of panic. Not only because this so-called evidence board was related to me, but also because of the fact that both my mentor and the person who created this had thought of the same thing. It made me feel an indescribable amount of fear.

Yes, fear.

I was afraid of this wall of evidence.

If the situation allowed for it, I would have curled up into a ball and screamed. The photos depicted my hometown from all sorts of angles, dissecting it up into chunks and revealing what I didn't even notice, though I had lived here for years and years. I knew that I wasn't able to gather anything important from it, but the way in which the information was displayed still gave me an eerie feeling. It almost gave me the feeling of a dissolution, rather than a dissection(*TN:?*).

"I didn't think that we'd be able to see this kind of hard work so easily."

Hearing the knight's words, my mentor shook his head.

"I don't think the person who created this tried to hide it at all. First, according to the rules of the village, nobody would reach the other side of the swamp anyway. They've probably also put up a bounded field accordingly, but nobody could have guessed that someone like us would get

swept around in a flood and come up from under the ground.”

“That makes sense,” the knight said, nodding.

Beside him, my mentor continued.

“There’s another possibility. Perhaps... there wasn’t enough time to conceal this place properly.”

“There wasn’t enough time?”

“Look at the kitchen.”

He didn’t turn around, he just pointed in that direction.

“There are still some freshly-ground coffee beans there. Whoever was here probably planned on drinking it when they came back later. Maybe they were the more practical sort of person, who cared less about the taste and more about how easy it was to prepare the drink. Either way, I think they planned on returning immediately after they left, but never got the chance.”

“The way you say that makes you sound more like a detective than a mage.”

“If I relied on my skills as a mage alone, I wouldn’t be able to get anywhere,” my mentor said somewhat self-deprecatingly, and then turned to look at the evidence board again (*TN: Wait I thought he specifically didn’t turn around a couple sentences ago wdym*). He flipped through some papers that had been stapled together, and for a couple of minutes, he froze.

“A-are you alright?”

“.....”

He did not respond immediately.

“...Is that the case. Ahh, is that the case? Fuck!”

Along with the curse word which would occasionally slip from his mouth, my mentor punched the wall. Though, with the strength he had, he probably wouldn't have managed to hurt himself seriously, I widened my eyes in surprise at the act.

“S-sir?”

“Reines and I didn't notice at the time, but someone we know was also there. Unfortunately, he left before we got involved in the reenactment.”

“Someone we know?”

He began carefully flipping through the papers again. He was probably computing a large number of formulas, and trying to imprint them into his brain. His eyes scanned across file after file, until he finally came to a conclusion.

“It's Heartless.”

“Huh?” I couldn't help but ask rhetorically.

For that reason, my mentor repeated the name once again.

“The person who created this evidence board was the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft (Norwich), Dr. Heartless.”

Right.

The reason why he had returned to this village was that he wanted to find more clues about Heartless. I had completely forgotten about this because of the absurdity of our previous encounters. First, I had been shocked by the fact that the village was abandoned, and then because we had been transported to the past. I never thought that we would end up returning to our original goal.

If that was the case, this was...

“...Ah, that makes sense. Though Zepia said that he made a deal with Heartless, the villagers never mentioned anyone like Heartless. If that’s because Heartless never got to the village at all, everything would be explained. It looks as if he observed the village for quite a while.”

“W-wait, why would Heartless spend time to research this village? You said just then that he was looking into the body, the mind, and the soul, so what do these papers actually say?”

“...Let me see, most of them are theses, and there are also some spells.”

My mentor shifted his gaze to the evidence board once more.

I was absolutely terrified. Ever since my mentor had found this evidence board, uneasiness had assailed my mind, and the fear had only increased further upon learning that the person who created it was Heartless. It was almost as if my mentor was confronting an enemy on a battlefield where I was completely helpless. The constant panic made me feel as if my throat was constricting.

The more he examined the evidence board, the scarier my mentor’s gaze looked.

“...Sir?”

“Heartless was trying to interfere with the spell that the village was planning to cast.”

“Is it like what Flat does?”

I recalled how the teenager would easily mess around with other people’s magecraft.

Though I had heard stories of how Flat had infiltrated top-secret Clock Tower meetings many times before, every time I brought up the details, my mentor would frown and put his hand over his stomach.

“No, Flat’s approach just relies on his own talents to tap into things and to counter them. This is far more elaborate and well thought-out...”

At that, he put one hand on the evidence board, and his eyes continued to wander about. After a while, he bowed his head in defeat and groaned quietly.

“...It’s pointless. I can’t understand this.”

“You... can’t?”

I was shocked.

This was the first time I had seen my mentor talk in such a demoralized way at a time like this.

I never thought that my mentor, who took apart other people’s magecraft as casually as he breathed and had even gotten into several crises because of it, would not be able to understand someone’s magecraft.

“I can comprehend the general idea. The formula is derived from Celtic spiritualism(*TN: it just says ‘the formula is derived from Celt’ and I don’t know what to do with it, I just randomly took a word that might fit*) and witchcraft, and the spell used for interference is based on Modern Magecraft and witchcraft, with some Atlesian Alchemy mixed in. I can understand up to this point. However, the structure of the spell is so delicate that it is difficult to deduce its exact effects. There are thousands of numbers that need to be taken into consideration. If even one of them is wrong, or if the thickness of a single line was

misread, it'll lead to a completely different result," my mentor said, pointing at the intricate lines on the notes on the evidence board.

It wasn't just a page or two. There were dozens of sheets stuck there, and each of them had a different scribbled pattern. Some of them resembled an angel's wings, others looked like ancient crowns, others had illustrations of star polygons, while others still had conglomerates of large amounts of strange shapes. (*TN: Actually, Gray here lists off the types of star polygons used, but I've gotten rid of them for the sake of structure. There's the pentagram (5-pointed star), the hexagram (6-pointed star), the hendecagram (11-pointed star), and the dodecagram (12-pointed star).*)

"It's like if you made a tiny edit to a landscape painting and accidentally turned it into a painting of a different country altogether. There's no uniformity whatsoever in terms of brushwork and paint. It should be impossible, but somehow, with his amazing persistence and excellent skill, he somehow forced it to mesh together. Ah, is this the true ability of Dr. Heartless, who supported the Lord-less Department of Modern Magecraft (Norwich) back then?"

The head of the Department of Modern Magecraft before my mentor.

A corner of his ability was clearly displayed in front of our eyes.

"If you had a brain like Zepia's, or perhaps first-rate Magic Circuits like Luviagelita's, it would be possible to continue developing the foundation in the same general direction. However, neither my brain nor my Magic Circuits are capable of that sort of calculation."

Those words were too bitter.

No matter how many times he faced it, he would not be able to give up, would he? Even more so if he had realized long ago that this was his specialty.

“At least if the Volumen Hydrargyrum (*TN: Wait doesn’t that just mean ‘the volume of mercury’? How’d they get that from Moon Spirit Marrow Fluid?*) was here...”

“Are you asking for me?”

Suddenly, a human figure appeared by the door.

“—Aaah!”

Not even the vigilant knight (Sir Kay) noticed her presence, and he yelled loudly, leaping backward in surprise.

I suppose that reaction was warranted, since a liquid had just suddenly taken on a human form after it slipped through the door crack. I widened my eyes in surprise as I looked at the silver person.

“Trimmau!”

“Here’s looking at you, kid. (*TN: A quote from the 1942 movie Casablanca*).”

I couldn’t help but blink many times in quick succession at the mercury maid who expressionlessly said what appeared to be a movie quote.

“...Why are you here?”

“Yesterday, Miss Reines ordered me to return to this village on the journey back to London. She told me to try not to get noticed by her older brother, to lend him a helping hand in case he encountered anything dangerous, and to make him feel as indebted to her as possible. Those were her orders. Since I could not find any trace of you, I was on standby

mode, but I detected your reaction just then and came as quickly as I could.”

“.....”

I was rendered speechless. My mentor had the same reaction, and covered his face with his hands.

“...Hahaha.” And then, he laughed, happily.

“Does that mean she did this during the First Cycle as well?”

His voice carried some resignation, but also some joy.

She had probably watched my mentor from a distance in the First Cycle as well. And then, when she made sure that no danger came of him, she had quietly returned with my mentor and I when we left the village.

“It sounds like something Miss Reines would do.”

I could feel the thoughtfulness that she had left behind seeping into my heart. If I told her that, though, she would probably look at me with a strange expression.

I wanted to go back, I thought.

I wanted to go back to the table where the girl was waiting.

I wanted to eat desserts, drink tea, and complain about my mentor together. Though the conversation would probably peter out quickly because of my stupid mouth, I would still have an extremely enjoyable time.

“But... What can Trimmau help you with?”

“(The) Volumen Hydrargyrum is the Mystic Code that used to belong to my teacher, Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald.”

This name, which I would occasionally hear, surprised me.

I had heard that my mentor had something to do with his death in the Fourth Holy Grail War.

However, for now, I put aside those thoughts and watched my mentor raise one of his fingers. As he made a hand gesture as if he was playing an orchestral instrument, Trimmau closed her eyes and also raised her right hand.

“The reason why the Mystic Code, which he made when he was in his twenties, was regarded as one of the Supreme Mystic Codes of the El-Melloi family is not only because it can serve as an excellent weapon.”

As my mentor spoke, Trimmau’s right hand instantly evaporated.

I reflexively clamped my hand over my mouth because I was worried about getting poisoned. However, the mercury did not continue to spread in the air. Instead, it condensed again in the air, in the shape of a large quantity of numbers.

“What...”

“The Volumen Hydrargyrum can also function as the El-Melloi Faction’s leading computational machine. Though only a small portion of its power can be used under my control.”

I had no idea that Trimmau had these kinds of hidden capabilities. The numbers and symbols floating in the air changed, disorienting me.

I still could not understand the relationship between the numbers and symbols that my mentor had described. However, my mentor’s gaze was extremely serious, and every time the numbers changed, by looking at it, I could glimpse the emotions circling in his heart.

For instance, agitation.

Jealousy.

Longing.

Maybe even anger.

Or, perhaps an emotion that was a mixture of all of the above.

What I saw did not tell me who Heartless was, but instead, what my mentor thought of him.

“Ah, is that the case. This spell... is a continuation of that one (*TN: the wording is extremely vague*). He wasn’t concerned with either one of the body, the mind, or the soul. Instead, he wanted to know how they can be preserved or deteriorated.”

As my mentor said that, he kept on looking between the evidence board and the numbers, and moving his fingers.

This time, the numbers began to turn into the patterns and pentagrams drawn on the notes. They then turned to patterns like the sun, the moon, stars, scales, fish, and mountain goats. I suppose that to a mage, those symbols were like a scientist’s equations.

At the same time, my mentor, who was surrounded by those symbols, looked like a melancholy philosopher.

Finally, the transformation stopped.

It looked as if the words on the mercury had reached some sort of conclusion.

In the space of a few seconds, my mentor froze.

“What’s wrong, Sir?”

“...I think I’ve found the answer. However...”

“...Sir?”

After a brief silence, he whirled around abruptly.

“Trimmau, how long is there until sunrise?”

“If ‘sunrise’ is defined as the sun completely rising above the horizon, there are approximately thirty-seven to forty-three minutes.”

“Then we need to get out of here immediately!” My mentor rapidly turned the floating mercury back into Trimmau’s right hand, and let his jacket flutter in the air behind him.

I caught up to him hurriedly.

“What’s the matter?”

“We need to get to the swamp. I’m sorry, there’s no time to explain now. Let’s first get running.”

“Hey, hey, are you sure you’re not going to collapse midway?” The knight teased. However, his expression became serious the moment he stepped out of the hut.

“—Huh, really in for the kill, aren’t they.”

“What do you mean, Sir Kay?”

“Whatever, the villagers looked like they were going to come sooner or later anyway. They must’ve gone through a great deal of trouble,” he replied flippantly, as if he couldn’t bother to spend more effort explaining.

I gradually heard it too— A sound coming from the foot of the mountain, in other words, the direction of the village, towards the swamp.

“Maybe the villagers sensed that something was wrong and started doing an all-out search of the mountain. Haha, if

we're going along this path, there'll be a direct confrontation at the swamp! If we don't make a run for it now, we'll have to stab our friends and relatives, so you'd better make sure you're up to the task!" The knight muttered, in the same frivolous tone as usual.

*

"Ha... Huh... Ha..." Midway up the mountainside, a man scaled the slope, walking as if his face was going to fall to the ground. It was Father Fernando. Droplets of water still dripped from his wet cassock.

He had been swept into a flood, and had just crawled out from a different cave. Even he himself had to marvel at how he was still alive. Perhaps it was because fat isn't very dense. Though he had separated from Sister Illumia, that wasn't a problem.

After all, the only reason why he was now desperately trying to climb the mountain was because an alive-and-well Sister Illumia had just instructed him to do so using telepathy.

Though the Holy Church prohibited all types of magecraft apart from the Baptism Rites used by priests, that was just something they said to the outside. Executors like Illumia were taught practical magecraft, such as strengthening and telepathy. Of course, these were all bundled up and given the name of "Sacraments". It was all just a corner of the knowledge and power the Holy Church had gathered up over time.

"Ugh... Phew..."

Dragging his sweat-soaked clothing along, Fernando continued to climb upward desperately. On the unpaved dirt, every step caused him to stumble, he grumbled constantly under his breath, and nearly fell down many times.

“What do you mean go to the swamp... I nearly drowned... Sister Illumia’s treating me like her servant or something...”

As he hobbled with an expression as if he could collapse and die of exhaustion any minute, he heard a voice.

“Are you alright, Father Fernando?”

The priest nearly jumped in surprise as he saw a person emerge from the forest. It took him a few seconds to realize who the person was, and he tried to swallow his fear and call out that person’s name.

“Bersac... Blackmore...”

It was the grave keeper of Blackmore Graveyard.

“...B-B-B-Bersac, what are you going t-to do to me?”

“I have no intent on harming you now,” the grave keeper said, shaking his head.

He still held the giant axe in his hands. The fact that he managed to escape the flood while still holding that axe was a testament to the grave keeper’s physical strength. On the contrary, unlike Illumia, the priest had no other abilities besides reciting Baptism Rites. As long as Bersac had the intent to do so, the priest would probably be sliced in half like the firewood he chopped every day.

Bersac continued to speak with the same calm, emotionless voice as usual.

“I just wanted to hear your opinion.”

“...You want to hear my opinion, as the grave keeper of Blackmore Graveyard?”

“Perhaps.”

The grave keeper still kept his courteous attitude.

It was the same attitude that he had during the countless exchanges they had had back at the village. He wouldn't say much, but he was ultimately respectful. Though the goal of the grave keeper did not always align with that of the Church, they had never been directly at odds with each other.

It was a strange relationship. Though they both knew that one day they could become enemies, they were still friendly to each other.

"The Holy Church isn't at a consensus, either, is it? At least, I don't think so," the grave keeper said in a low voice. "I've always had my suspicions. Both you and Illumia keep talking to Gray whenever you two have the chance. The nun probably just wants to watch her, but I feel like you think differently. Can you tell me what your reasons for that are?"

"...If I just say you imagined it all, you won't accept it, will you?"

Like those of a fat, cowering mouse, the priest's eyeballs spun around and around as he observed his surroundings.

"Sister Illumia isn't around here. Though she established a telepathic connection with you, she will not be able to monitor your every move," Bersac added quietly.

"....."

"Father Fernando, can I hear your personal opinion?"

"Ah, uh... a-alright."

The priest cleared his throat, and timidly attempted to read Bersac's expression. Of course, the grave keeper's face remained devoid of emotion.

Giving up on trying to figure out what the grave keeper was thinking, his round jaw shook as he finally opened his lips and answered the question/

“...As a representative of the Holy Church, I certainly think that King Arthur is a heretic. Even if we wanted to bring it under our religion, that way of existence is too deeply rooted in local traditions.”

The priest’s interpretation was incredibly standard for the Holy Church.

Though many of the legends about King Arthur were heavily influenced by that religion, they were no longer applicable in modern times. After all, regardless of whether it was the court magician, the enchantress, or the king herself (*TN: The king... herself. ...Ehh whatever*), they all could not be separated from local beliefs.

However.

One of the grave keeper’s eyebrows twitched.

“But this has nothing to do with that girl at all, right?” The priest said, after a brief pause.

The summer breeze began to pick up.

“You’re saying that they’re unrelated?” The grave keeper asked slowly.

“They can’t be related, can they? Isn’t this village just pushing the beliefs of the past onto future generations and forcing other people to get sacrificed?” The priest said decisively. For a moment, his face was full of joy, like that of a traveler who was finally able to put down his bag after a long journey. However, that joy was quickly overshadowed.

“I’m not qualified to be saying that, though.”

“Why?”

“...Because of that incident ten years ago,” the priest said in a somewhat bitter voice. “I was the one who reported the changing of Gray’s face to the Holy Church.”

“.....”

Bersac did not say anything, not even a remark like “I knew all along”, or “that was a surprise”.

“I didn’t think that things would get so serious back then. Of course, I felt a bit uneasy with the prospect that a girl’s face changed overnight, but I dismissed it as puberty when I found out that she was still the same person. I just thought that the villagers’ attitude towards her was worth reporting, especially her mother’s.”

A wry smile appeared on the priest’s lips.

No one in the village was unaware of how devoted that mother was to her daughter. The only reason why the faith in King Arthur, which had diminished for millennia, was on the rise again, was because of that mother and the village elder.

“So, I wrote it in my periodic reports, just in case. That’s all I did.” Perhaps because he was tired of standing, he leaned against a nearby tree and continued. “And then, after a while, I heard that Sister Illumia was being sent here. She’s a true member of the Holy Church, a prodigy trained by the Chivalric Order and given the power to expel mages and non-human creatures alike. She’s not like me, who was sent here forcibly to stand guard because I had the tiniest bit of talent.”

The priest wiped at his sweat and smiled a bitter smile.

“She keeps telling me that if there’s something that might endanger the Holy Church, removing it from its roots is also part of the Lord’s teachings. Ah, she must be correct. Actually, the two of us are from different factions. If we were born a couple centuries earlier, I would probably get hunted down by her for being a heretic.”

Such was the history of that religion.

In a sense, they hated the heretics that stemmed from their own religion more than they hated other religions. The more their values aligned, the less they could tolerate minor differences. ...Perhaps that was just the nature of humanity.

“For that reason, I’m not qualified to be saying all this,” the priest mumbled. “Of course, I’m sure that what I did back then was not punishable, considering what my role was. Though I know that, I’ve wondered these years whether I can really claim to be upholding the Holy Order. ...What, your expression has gone all strange. Did I say anything ridiculous?”

“...Oh, no, it isn’t,” Bersac said, shaking his head.

After a pause, the grave keeper continued.

“I’m just thankful to the things I believe in that not everything in the village is a lie. At least what you saw in that village was the same as what I saw.”

“...Huh.” The priest averted his eyes before speaking again in a sincere tone. “What side do you plan on standing on?”

“Which side I stand on?”

“On the side of the Holy Church, or on the side of the villagers?” Fernando’s voice was full of passion as it resounded through the woods. “I know you have connections to the government. Illumia’s quite sensitive

toward these things. But you're not a spy, are you? The grave keepers of Blackmore Graveyard outdate King Arthur. Therefore, you don't worship King Arthur like the other villagers. If you stand on our side, it won't distort your beliefs, will it?"

Hearing the priest's words, the grave keeper raised one eyebrow in surprise.

"I think I understand why the Holy Church chose you as a supervisor. Under most circumstances, no one is better at acclimating heretics than you are."

"Are you complimenting me?"

"That was what I intended to do, yes. I plan on protecting that girl, as the grave keeper of Blackmore Graveyard."

"If that's the case, you'll..."

"Even if we hand Gray to the Holy Church, there's no way to guarantee her safety. Sure, it is possible to ask for forgiveness in your religion, but that does not apply to our world. Forgiveness is meant for humans. There is no need to uphold the same standards for us inhuman folk."

"Well. ...You're not wrong."

"Thank you for your concern, though."

Bersac bowed his head in thanks. Then, he suddenly crossed his arms and leaned back on a tree, like Father Fernando was doing, and closed his eyes.

"I didn't see anything or meet anyone here. I closed my eyes because I was a little tired, and if anyone passed by here in the last couple of minutes, I didn't notice their presence."

“...I still have things I want to say, but I suppose I can only thank you for now.”

Fernando puffed up his chest proudly and continued to walk up the mountain.

A voice came from behind him.

“The next time we meet... We’ll have to fight each other for our lives.”

“N-n-no, ah, please spare me,” the priest said, in a distressed voice, and stumbled up the slope, trembling. Though he huffily wiped at his sweat with his soaked cassock, he did not stop walking.

Right as the priest disappeared in the fog in the distance, Bersac slowly opened his eyes. With footsteps that didn’t show a trace of fatigue, he also continued walking upward. The swamp was right up ahead. The final battle would probably happen there, the grave keeper thought. The lie that had been maintained in that village up to now was about to fall apart. The peace that everyone wished would continue was going to end.

“—Aaaaah!”

Suddenly, a scream tore through the forest.

Recognizing the voice, Bersac began to run as if he had been knocked into the air(TN:?). He reached the origin of the voice with an amazing speed. His eyes widened as he saw what was there.

“Father Fernando...!”

The priest lay there on the floor. His clothes were stained red by blood. Bersac rushed over hurriedly, put a hand on Father Fernando’s neck, and stiffened.

“He’s dead...”

But Fernando had only been out of Bersac’s line of sight for a couple of minutes. What had happened in the space of a few, short minutes?

“Did he get stabbed in the back with a dagger or something?” Bersac muttered as he examined the priest’s bloodstained back.

It went without saying that Father Fernando had never received any kind of combat training, so as long as his killer caught him by surprise, anyone in the village could have killed him. But who could it be? Fernando should have been incredibly cautious. The only person he would have let his guard down around would be Illumia, but she had no incentive to kill the priest.

Bersac also noticed another unbelievable thing.

“His clothes... [are dry]...?”

-End of Part 3 of Chapter 3 of Book 7-

Chapter 3, Part 4:

We ran down the mountain after my mentor, and were about to reach the swamp.

Trimmau cut through the dense shrubbery in front of us, creating a path. I suppose that was the most fitting job for her, considering that she didn’t get tired. Though my mentor was usually the first person to collapse from exhaustion, this time, he tried his best to endure, and continued walking down the steep slope.

The knight (Sir Kay) guarded our rear, and I stayed close to my mentor. Add still remained as a scythe in my hands, and

showed no sign of waking up. Realizing this, I bit my lip.

At that moment, my mentor spoke.

“Is it really a good idea to just face the villagers like this?”

“...I think we can do it.”

“Your mother might be there.”

“...It’s okay, I know.”

I nodded twice.

The shock that came from knowing that they launched an all-out search of the mountain was temporary, because from the moment we became enemies the village, I understood that I would have to confront my mother.

“Let’s not talk about that now. What did you find out just then? What has Heartless been doing here?”

“Though I have a basic understanding of what’s written on the evidence board, I only have hypotheses about what exactly he was planning. I do have a theory about he was doing before the incident, though.”

“Before the incident?”

“It’s something that happened during the First Cycle. Bersac told me that on the first day, someone broke multiple rules.”

I recalled what Reines had told me.

After they talked to Zepia, Bersac had said something, and asked them if they knew something about it.

—“When children play outside, sometimes the rules get broken. ...But this time, two rules were broken.”

“It was actually caused by Heartless approaching the village at night, possibly to make final preparations or something

along those lines. After that, he [left straight away], without praying to the Black Madonna.”

“He... left...”

True, this way, two rules would be broken, the one about going out at night, and the one about praying to the Black Madonna.

“Then what about when he came?”

“That hut was built on the other end of the swamp. It’s probably outside the detection range of the magecraft. He might still have broken the rules, though. Bersac said that some rules would be broken once in a while, such as the one about going out at night. I suppose he doesn’t care that much about them, anyway.”

That was a reasonable statement.

But if that was the case, how long had Heartless secretly been in this village? How much time had he spent, staying just outside of the village and spying on us?

“.....”

An eerie feeling coiled up at the bottom of my heart.

It was a different type of raw disgust to the one I had felt when I had been told of the secret of this village.

It made me feel as if I had been watched by the gaze of an insect instead of a human. We had only ever met once, on the Rail Zeppelin, but that encounter alone was enough for me to discern something inhuman about that man. What did it mean, then, if that kind of person had watched me for a long period of time?

“Heartless never really involves himself in cases,” my mentor analyzed. “Other than when he provided funds in the case at the Twin Towers of Ilsema, he’s probably also related to many other incidents. Most of them are heavily covered up, though. If he didn’t do so, he’d end up getting targeted by something.”

After saying that much, he paused for a few seconds before he continued to speak.

“I was the one who happened to put an end to that.”

“Huh.” This time, it was the knight who cooperated by responding. “I see. So that’s why the evidence board or whatever it’s called is there. Understandable. That means that the turning point of this case was...”

In response to the knight’s somewhat cheerful words, my mentor nodded sternly.

“Yes, it was me.”

“Why would it be you?”(*TN: Gray says this.*)

“Think about why the Holy Church would choose to act now. Since a Lord of the Clock Tower has come to visit, I don’t think it would continue to idly stand by. At least, Heartless believed that was the case. That’s why he left.”

“.....”

I clenched my fists.

This was only logical. My mentor was at least still one of only twelve Lords of the Clock Tower, and his every move had to be watched. Something like a Lord visiting the village they were watching over as the Fifth Holy Grail War and the revival of King Arthur loomed just over the horizon couldn’t just be dismissed as a coincidence.

Even though it was such a natural conclusion, I had overlooked it.

“Heartless probably never anticipated that I would come to the village. Yes, it’s incredibly unexpected that one of the twelve Lords would recklessly visit this village. Even if he isn’t behind everything, he plays a role in this case.”

“We will be there soon,” the mercury maid said softly.

Just as she said, the forest immediately broke away to reveal flat land.

The light of the rising sun gently pricked my eyes.

The swamp was right in front of us.

Though I’d gotten close to this place before, now that I was right in front of it, I thought that it was a bit too big for a swamp (*TN: When since did swamps have a size limit?*). Though the waters were muddy now, it might have been clearer in the past.

Gradually, the beams of sunlight expanded their dominion, creeping slowly across the mountain slopes. However, I could not appreciate this breathtaking sight.

Dawn was breaking.

That meant—

“It’s almost time for you to die. No, it’s almost the time you died in the past(*TN: Aaa this used to be so concise and logical*),” my mentor said.

How inconsiderate. He spoke as if it was his duty to speak the truth whenever he saw it. That was probably why so many mages hated him. Because the veil of mystery that concealed the truth was an indispensable wall of defense that protected magecraft.

“Therefore, it definitely won’t deviate from this timeline.”

He uttered those words as he stared toward the swamp.

—And then.

As if that was a prophecy, something appeared.

A giant shadow tore through the mud and rose from the surface of the water.

It was much larger than a person.

A familiar building emerged from the water. No, it wasn’t just familiar. Actually, it was something that I had seen mere hours ago. The most unforgettable thing was the statue near the entrance that was now illuminated by the morning light. One half of the temple rose through the water and joined with the other half, as if they were forming a bridge.

“[That temple]... has come up from the water...?” I mumbled in confusion as I saw the sight which I could never have dreamed up of.

Yes.

Rising in the thin mist of the dawn was, indeed, the underground temple we had found before we fought with the Husk King.

Of course, according to the laws of physics, the stone structure and the foundations supporting it could never have risen from the swamp. This was undoubtedly the result of mystery, of a scale that was beyond the reach of modern mages.

“...Ah, damn it, is that what it is? Those idiot mages really care about this kind of crap” the knight said beside me.

The flippant attitude from before had disappeared completely. The knight of the round table gritted his teeth.

“That’s... Avalon...!”

*

“W-what is that!? Where’d it come from? How’d it get up here?”

The voice was more like that of a child getting excited over a new toy than someone who was genuinely surprised.

“Didn’t you say that the structure was unnatural?” Zepia replied in a calm voice.

Indeed, Flat, who had been in charge of adjusting the parameters, had said that when the flood happened.

—“The structure of that place is pretty unnatural anyway... Let me think, that means that we can use this method to mess with this place that looks like the past, right?”

It was the reason why it was relatively easy for Flat to intervene, and how Zepia accepted their success.

These two things originated from the same place. In other words, the reason why Flat was able to cause a flood was that there was already such a structure underground.

“In order to raise it, there’s actually a sequence that needs to be followed. I actually had to spend quite a bit of effort to skip all of that. The program to dispel the Bounded Field at the same time the temple started rising seems to have run perfectly.”

In response to Zepia’s words, Flat looked up.

“...So, you’re saying that you completely countered my attack by turning my intervention against me?”

“Hm,” Zepia said. His eyelashes fluttered. “That isn’t the area your instructor specializes in, so I don’t suppose he ever taught you this. Intervention through magecraft contains techniques from all sorts of systems. Simply using regular Circuits in an unorthodox way isn’t an ability. Though it doesn’t happen very often, when a mage meets a hacker, there are some techniques that are commonly used.”

The finger of the alchemist seemed to be striking on the keys of an invisible keyboard.

Every action that he made seemed to play on a magical note in the world which resembled the past that Lord El-Melloi II was currently within. Perhaps it was these notes, which were inaudible to the human ear, was rocking the foundations of the world itself.

“For me, this is a rare, golden opportunity for me to showcase the abilities which I have long forgotten about.”

There was a detectable amount of pride and confidence in Zepia’s words.

“Ahaha! That’s awesome! I didn’t know that magecraft could be used that way! The Atlas Institute’s really full of mysteries, like a collectible card game that’s been out for a couple decades!”

“Can you calm down for a bit?” Svin warned his classmate, as he stared intently at the crystal ball. In its reflection, their beloved lecturer of the Clock Tower faced the rising tower.

“Let’s see,” Zepia said, turning to look at the crystal ball once more. “Can you arrive at the mystery you are to solve, Lord El-Melloi II?”

-End of Part 4 of Chapter 3 of Book 7-

Chapter 3, Part 5:

“Avalon... Isn’t that-”

Of course I knew that name.

It was the place where the dead King Arthur had been carried to, and where he would be revived. It wouldn’t be a stretch to call that place the most sacred place in Britain, and yet—

“It’s the temple over there...?”

“It’s probably not the real Avalon, but rather, something based on the legend. Just like Sir Kay said, analogies are incredibly important in magecraft (*TN: Yeah I’m pretty sure I missed something but I can’t figure out what. So please assume Kay said something in the past couple parts about analogies/comparisons/imitations/I don’t even know how to translate that word aaa*).”

“Ha. Surprisingly knowledgeable, huh?” The knight muttered, as if he admired him.

However, I felt that those words were more than his feelings on the matter. There was something else, but I couldn’t say that I understood his thoughts very well.

“According to the evidence board, the body, mind, and soul will combine into one in that temple.” my mentor said, trying to suppress the tremble in his voice.

My body would be sacrificed in that sacred place.

If that was the case, the Husk King would also be waiting there, as the mind.

“The villagers are all heading into the swamp from the bridge-like thing. I don’t know if they already knew this was

going to happen, but they're probably holding hands, being all nice to each other, and anticipating your arrival." The knight sighed, annoyed, "But if we're just going to walk straight in there, we're going to lose spectacularly. If she pulls out that black lance again, it won't be a question of whether we'll survive, the entire mountain'll probably get blown into smithereens. I guess it'd be a quick, painless death, but that's still a stupid ending."

"It won't happen."

Hearing a voice that denied what he said, the knight turned around.

"Something like that is not going to happen."

There was a calm certainty in my mentor's words.

Soon after this, I would learn the meaning of those words—That was to say, the "ending" of this Second Cycle.

-End of Part 5 of Chapter 3 of Book 7-

Chapter 4, Part 1:

◆ 第四章 ◆



A few bridges had been created with the temple at its center.

That was probably also part of the mechanism. The water that still remained on the stone floorboards also seemed to be slowly draining away.

The temple, which had now been doused in water, looked completely different from when it was underground, and

gave off an air of majesty.

Perhaps this was its original form. I could think of many legends about temples regaining their sacred appearances after returning to the surface from the moldy underground. In ancient legends, dead gods would also regain their glory after returning from the underworld.

A couple of groups of people had gathered at the entrance to the temple.

One group was the villagers.

There were a few dozen of them, each carrying an old axe or hoe, and keeping a close eye on us. The rest of them were probably absent either because they were too old or because they still could not move.

“It’s the body...”

“The body... of King Arthur...”

Hearing their whispers, I could not help but clamp my eyes shut.

Would they no longer call me Gray?

Behind them, there were two people. One was a female representative, and the other was the old woman.

“Mother, and Granny.”

“You stupid girl...” said the old woman in a low voice.

My mother did not say anything. My figure was reflected emotionlessly in her blank, glasslike eyes. Even at a time like this, their expression toward me did not change.

The other “group” was composed solely of Sister Illumia.

She was only wearing her nun's clothing, and she seemed relaxed, only looking toward the villagers, as if to say that even alone, she could go up against all the villagers. No, this was probably the truth. With the physical prowess she displayed, it wouldn't take anything for her to defeat a group of regular villagers.

Actually, it was the villagers who looked terrified. No matter how fervent their belief was, it was difficult to turn inexperienced people into warriors.

And then, at an equal distance from both of the parties, were the bone soldiers. Looking at the three groups gave me a surreal feeling. The "ending" that nobody had predicted had arrived.

"...Why are you so slow?" Sister Illumia asked.

"Aren't you guys fighting?" (*TN: Who says this is unclear. I just assumed it's Sir Kay because it's easier to translate that way*)

"Of course not. Do you think this is the time to fight? After I discovered the mechanism in the swamp, I thought I was going to be the first one here. When I got here, though, it'd already become like this. ...Oh, that means I'm the first witness, does that make me unreliable?"

The nun pointed her chin in that direction.

She was probably telling the truth. There were no signs of a fight in the surrounding area. Even if it was Sister Illumia, she wouldn't have come out of a fight with that person completely unharmed.

However.

"Why would it... end up like this..." Said the old woman, in a voice that reminded me of a string that had finally snapped.

Even the old woman who had done so much for her beliefs had finally lost her fervor.

Yes, there was no need to stop them. There was no need at all. For the thing that they had given up their lives for had already been taken away from them.

“...Oi, what... happened?”

Even the knight’s (Sir Kay’s) voice was full of confusion.

Everyone’s gaze was focused on something behind the bone soldiers, right underneath the Black Madonna statue.

Someone lay there, in the place that was supposed to be this altar.

Ah, I had seen this before. Though I had forgotten it, though I should have forgotten it, when this scene appeared in front of my eyes, I recalled it.

An intense headache hit me.

The pain made me see a flash of white, and dug out memories that had been lodged even deeper in my mind.

The first thing I remembered was the smell.

The smell of rotting weeds and water.

The miasma made it feel like my throat was going to rot as I breathed it in.

[Back then], perhaps the swamp was murkier than it was now. Swirling around my nasal cavity, this odor might even have caused disease if I breathed it for too long.

The sound came next.

It was the sound of the shrieking of what seemed like hundreds of ravens.

Next to that, someone was yelling at me.

—“You... (did something to)... me...”

Ah.

That ending had been revealed.

“The Husk King... died...?”

My voice didn't even sound like my own.

Behind the bone soldiers and under the gaze of the Black Madonna, a pool of red blood had formed around the neck of the fallen girl.

-End of Part 1 of Chapter 4 of Book 7-

Chapter 4, Part 2:

It was evidently a fatal wound.

The girl lay unmoving on the altar. The blood had long since started to spread, and was now drying from the edges.

What lay there was now simply an object.

A hunk of meat devoid of life.

“W-why...”

My voice sounded like someone else's entirely.

No.

I was not completely unprepared for this.

Since I had survived the First Cycle while someone who looked like me had died, there was only one person who that could be. For that reason, I had a vague premonition that the same would happen in the Second Cycle as well.

There had to be some sort of reason for this. Somehow, the Husk King had suddenly died, as if the tide of the events that had suddenly shifted.

Just as I was reeling from the shock of this, another person appeared from the bridge in the direction of the village.

“...How did this happen?”

“Bersac.”

It was the grave keeper of Blackmore Graveyard, and my other teacher, who had taught me how to fight and survive.

As he looked at the corpse of the Husk King, his serious expression did not change a bit.

“On the way here, I found the corpse of Father Fernando. It looked like he had been fighting someone... Just to be clear, I didn’t kill him.”

“What!?” Sister Illumia exclaimed, whirling around with her exquisite eyebrows raised. “You killed the priest!?” (*TN: even in times of crisis this book will not stop talking about how pretty some of the characters are*)

“I said, it wasn’t me.” Bersac reiterated.

I stared at him with widened eyes.

“...How...!”

It almost felt like a serial murder case.

Had this happened as well during the First Cycle?

The deaths of Father Fernando and the Husk King seemed to have dropped a huge bomb onto the current situation. It was too sudden, and too difficult to accept. What had happened to cause this?

I covered my temples with my hands to try and stop my headache when I heard a strange creaking sound.

...What was it?

It sounded like tapes were being burnt, or like the edges of documents were being singed. Just as my attention was drawn to this sound, my mentor spoke.

“So it did end up like this.”

“Did you predict that this would happen, Lord El-Melloi II?”
The knight (Sir Kay) asked.

Indeed, my mentor had said something about how we wouldn’t fight the Husk King. Was that because he had already predicted her death?

“During the First Cycle, Bersac told me that Gray’s corpse had appeared next to the Black Madonna, so no one would try to follow us. I thought back then that they had discovered it in the church, but that wasn’t the case. There is another Black Madonna. Of course, Bersac didn’t have time to explain to me back then. ...If that’s the case, since this isn’t the past, I think it has to be settled here,” my mentor said quietly, so the people around us wouldn’t hear us discussing the past.

However hard we tried to explain to the people here, they probably wouldn’t understand that this world was actually a reenactment.

“This place isn’t the past?”

“I’ve been wondering, if this place isn’t the past, what is it? If we assume that it’s just a simulation, there shouldn’t be a need to send us to a specific point in the past. What’s important is the meaning to this reenactment.”

After he said that, he turned to look in a different direction.

“[Magdalena]”, he called out.

For a moment, I was confused as to whose name that was, because though it was my mother’s name, nobody in the village ever called her that.

“That’s your name, right? I’ve heard Gray bring it up before.”

Have I brought it up before? I couldn’t remember. Perhaps I did mention that name once or twice in all the conversations I had had after arriving in London.

“Only you know why this ending happened.”

“What do you mean?”

My mother’s expression did not change.

No. That only lasted for a couple of seconds. As if the plaster that had been on her face had suddenly fallen apart, her expression began to violently contort.

“How...” Her throat shook. How long had it been since I saw my mother in a frantic state? “How do you know... Unless, you’re...!”

She moaned, and began to run with stumbling steps.

Ripples formed under her feet in the water still on the floor of the temple as she rushed defenselessly towards the bone soldiers.

“Mother!”

“Ugh— Trimmau!”

My mentor shot out a magic bullet and called for the mercury maid’s help. Her limbs immediately dissolved and then turned into sharp blades. She slashed through the

bone soldiers who were trying to guard the Husk King's corpse and cleared out a path for my mother.

"What a pain in the ass!" The knight complained, sticking his tongue out and pulling out his sword.

Trimmau, the knight (Sir Kay) and I all rushed forward to meet the bone soldiers' attacks. Because everything had been so sudden, the old woman and the other villagers had not had time to react yet. Just as the blades of the bone soldiers were about to land on their heads, someone charged in and used his giant axe to block the blows.

"Mr. Bersac."

"I'm prepared to be your enemy, but I won't stand there and watch my former companions die." The grave keeper raised his hand and summoned a group of spirit ravens.

The ravens swooped down and pecked apart many of the bone soldiers, while others were crushed under Bersac's axe. Though there were still a lot of bone soldiers, they were no enough to overwhelm the grave keeper. Perhaps because she didn't care about the villagers much, Sister Illumia only watched from the side, occasionally using one hand to deal with the bone soldiers that attempted to attack her.

As that happened, my mentor cautiously walked over and extended a hand.

"Are you alright, Lady (*TN: I mean he really just goes around calling people 'lady', I think it's just a Case Files thing*)?" He asked, helping my mother up.

I still had no idea what had happened.

Why would my mother rush toward the bone soldiers? Why would my mentor try to save her? Ah, no. What confused me most of all was why I felt so relieved. I knew so

clearly that my mother only saw me as a subject of worship, and yet, I still felt thankful that she was safe, like an idiot.

“I...” My mother muttered, and my mentor nodded gently.

“Gray, Trimmau, are you holding up?”

“W-we’re alright!” Perhaps because the Husk King wasn’t alive anymore, Bersac, the knight (Sir Kay) (*TN: Would it kill you to call him by his name?*) and I were able to hold off the bone soldiers.

“—Well then, let’s continue the lecture,” my mentor announced, standing up. He slowly turned to look at the villagers. “Have you ever seen the Husk King’s face?”

The old woman did not answer my mentor’s question immediately. After a while, she shook her wrinkled head.

“...There’s no need for that.”

“Exactly. Such is the nature of faith. Gods only exist when people believe in them, and even if there isn’t a taboo against seeking their true appearance, it’s only natural to not wish to do so. This isn’t an accusation, because I also believed in what you do, once. After all, from a certain distance, it’s impossible to tell who someone is if they’re wearing armor,” my mentor said, shaking his head.

“...What are you talking about?”

“I just wanted to make sure,” my mentor said, with a somewhat stiff expression. “I’m sure no one here is aware of this, but when we first escaped from the village, Gray had been in a state of mental distress. The only way I figured out that there had been unrest among the villagers was through my own deductions. It if wasn’t for the fact that all the villagers were on the move, I wouldn’t have been able to leave successfully. Yes, for that reason, I can conclude that

nobody checked her true appearance, and everyone believed that the one who died was Gray."

That was true.

But what was my mentor trying to say?

As I parried the bone soldiers' attacks, I heard that strange sound again (*TN: the sound goes 'jiji...jiji' and was written in emphasized katakana*). The noise became faster and faster, and seemed to envelop the entire temple.

That was not all. Soon, a web of tiny cracks appeared in the swamp around the temple (*TN: ...Actually it might be a marsh...? Or maybe a bog if it smells so bad. It's probably too irrelevant of a detail to be fussing over anyway*). The clearly unnatural cracks appeared on the surface of the water, and showed no sign of disappearing.

It was as if the noise was a cacophony meant to interfere with the whole world.

"...Sir, the swamp is... [falling apart]," I whispered to him, guarding his back.

My mentor nodded. "Yes. But it seems that the only ones who noticed are the two of us and Sir Kay."

It was strange, as if this world could no longer continue to exist. Strange phenomena appeared one after the other, and yet, neither the villagers, nor Sister Illumia, nor Bersac had any reaction.

"The reason for that is probably because we are all from the outside world. So, in other words, the people inside a world cannot perceive its correction."

"Correction? (*TN: spent too long trying to find the proper name for this, gave up*)"

“Something like that appears quite frequently in science fiction. Actually, a similar theory exists in magecraft, where it is believed that time is under some sort of directional influence. Though this place is not the past, something similar probably exists here.”

Hearing my mentor’s words, I blinked.

A correctional force.

If that was the case, did the Husk King die of the same reason she did during the First Cycle?

“The time for the play has already been decided. No matter how grand the performance may be, no matter how many encores may be enacted— Or perhaps precisely for that reason, every show must come to an end. An unyielding, illogical, inexorable end(deux ex machina).”

I had heard this phrase before.

In Ancient Greek plays, people would have the gods suddenly appear when the plot reached a deadlock by delivering judgement or resolving conflict. The deus ex machina was created for this reason.

Perhaps this was acceptable for an ancient play.

Even in later decades, people said that it could stay it for its beauty. And so the story of how the scholar who lost to the demons was miraculously saved by angels was greeted with thunderous applause.

And now, what meaning did that phrase hold?

How would this play end?

And most importantly, in this situation, who was the god in question?

“Then, the reason why you rushed here was—”

“Exactly. This stage only exists in this exact time. The ending will be here soon, so we must get here in time, because only the people who usher in this moment will be fixed onto the stage.”

My mentor looked up at the center of the mass of bone soldiers.

“Gray, can you clear a path to the Husk King please,” he said calmly as he gazed toward the Husk King’s corpse.

“Yes!”

Hearing his words, I began to swing my scythe. Perhaps because we weren’t underground anymore, my Strengthening abilities had recovered somewhat. Trimmau and I worked together and carved out a path for my mentor.

With my mother in tow, and with the help of magic bullets, he finally reached the corpse. He gazed at the wretched corpse for a while before extending a hand.

“...What are you doing, Lord El-Melloi II?”

“As you can see,” my mentor answered resolutely in response to my mother’s question, “—This is her true face!”

He removed the mask. The sound of the mask hitting the floor was softer than I had expected. Nobody else would probably pay any attention to that sound, though, for I was struck speechless by that face.

...Ah.

Of course, I had also believed in it without a doubt. She was, without question, the mind of King Arthur. Even without that dark Rhongomyniad, her very existence resonated with

mine, so I believed that there would be a face identical to mine under that mask.

However, it was—

“[Mother]...” I moaned, and collapsed to the floor like the mask. The face beneath the mask— ah, though it looked very young, it was impossible to mistake it for anything else — was that of my mother.

“It’s like this. You are both the victim and the culprit, Magdalena,” my mentor announced, as my mother stood there, frozen.

*

...I didn’t know.

I didn’t have this kind of memory.

But my heart still remembered it. Though it had been erased from the surface of my mind, the information still existed, carved deep into me. Floating up like bubbles from a deep, dark ocean and announcing its presence, that memory had not disappeared.

The smell of rotting weeds and water.

The piercing cries of ravens.

That was...

Yes.

That was it.

...Someone was lying there. ...It wasn’t me. But, it was someone who looked like me, someone who used to look like me.

[Why?]

I heard a voice.

[Why did you... make me... into you? (*TN: This is supposed to fit into the 'you...(did something to)... me' from earlier, but unfortunately the grammar doesn't quite work out in English*)]

They were thoughts that had not been converted into language. They were the crisscrossing thoughts of someone right next to me.

It was a conversation that should not have been heard by anyone. The only reason why I heard it was probably because I had almost completely lost consciousness, and entered some kind of strange, hazy state. If that was the case, the reason why I perceived those thoughts as sounds was because my brain had interpreted the characteristics of those thoughts.

[I'm sorry.]

Ah, that was a voice I was familiar with.

It was a voice that I had known for a long time.

[You were meant to have taken that child's body, and that is why you have waited here. ...I'm sorry. That is the only thing I can't tolerate.]

I knew that calm, steady tone.

So steady that it terrified me. I had thought that I could never disobey this person. I had believed that I would forever live under this person's command.

The thoughts ended here.

Less than a minute had actually passed.

And then,

“You... (did something to)... me...”

I finally understood those thoughts of the Husk King, which manifested soundlessly inside my mind.

*

“Mother...!”

It was said that, when exposed to shocks, human brains will sometimes block out information from the outside world.

I only had enough brain capacity to process the information that had just been revealed to me. My senses had stopped functioning briefly, and the world suddenly seemed to freeze, like an old movie playing from a damaged film.

Though I was in the middle of a battle, I couldn’t do anything except reflexively dodge the bone soldiers’ attacks.

However, my mentor continued to speak.

“It’s actually not quite accurate to call you the culprit. Though I say that, it’s different if I say that you were [once] the culprit. Perhaps a better way to say it would be that in the original timeline, you would have gone with your plan and [became] the killer.”

“...I,” my mother said in a low voice. She glanced at the unmasked person who looked exactly like herself, and immediately looked back to my mentor. “That means, I...”

“It’s alright.”

I didn’t know why, but my mentor’s voice was incredibly gentle and calm.

“You’ve already achieved your goal. I can assure you, not a single day of your effort was wasted.”

“.....”

My mother smiled.

I didn't remember how long it had been since I had seen that expression from her.

"Wonderful... So that's how it is... I see..."

She covered her mouth with her hands, as if she finally understood something.

—Then, she disappeared without a trace, as if she had never existed in the first place. In her place, an old, curved dagger fell to the floor at my mentor's feet.

"Mother!"

My own cries sounded distant. An indescribable sense of terror and despair invaded my brain. I felt like I was a sobbing child as I kneeled where my mother had just disappeared.

"Where is she!?"

"Isn't it obvious?" My mentor said as he gestured toward the Husk King's corpse. "This is her corpse. Although the two can coexist before the original is identified, once that happens, the copy created by the simulation must disappear, like a doppelgänger. Oh, right, Father Fernando probably also died of the same reason."

What did this mean?

I could not understand what my mentor was saying at all. (*TN: very relatable*)

However, my heart had been throbbing violently in my chest ever since the Husk King was unmasked, as if it was trying to tell me something.

“El-Melloi III!” Yelled one of the villagers, the old woman who was their leader. “What have you done!?”

Her howls were more like pleas than accusations.

Like me, she could not understand what she had just witnessed. However, there was the added weight of more than a thousand years on the old woman’s shoulders.

In response to that, my mentor only took out his box of cigars from his pocket.

Though the battle had not ended yet, he lit it with a snap and placed it in his mouth.

That was not a show of his carelessness. To my mentor, this act must be like a switch, my still-fuzzy brain thought. A switch to hide his original personality, and to activate the identity of “Lord El-Melloi II” of the Clock Tower.

“Unfortunately, I didn’t do anything. I couldn’t have done anything. I just made a guess based on the clues that were here,” my mentor said as he exhaled a puff of smoke.

I couldn’t help but turn my head at those words. The old woman could not understand what he was trying to say, and she shot back a rhetorical question like a parrot repeating human words.

“A prediction?”

“You call Gray the body of King Arthur, yes? That means, you know that the Husk King is the mind, and even though you clearly understand that you lack the soul, you attempted to merge the two here. However, that ritual has been [distorted].”

Everyone was stunned by the impact of those words.

The only people who didn't get affected— or at least, didn't seem affected, were Trimmau and the bone soldiers, who didn't have the ability to feel that way, and the knight, whose expression was impossible to discern.

Everyone else held their breaths, like suspects listening to a detective's deduction. Nobody dared to take even a single breath. That was how impactful the face behind the mask and my mentor's words were.

"You're saying that the ritual... has been distorted..." The old woman's voice was full of pain.

Perhaps she had devoted her entire life to this ritual. It wasn't just her, either. Everyone else related to the old woman had poured precious hours and days of their life into this. Their persistence, passions, longings, history, traditions, and dreams had all been discarded for the sake of this ritual.

Just then, we had heard the sound of all of it breaking apart.

"Originally, the Husk King shouldn't have had a face. The mind of the king alone cannot materialize completely, much like Sir Kay."

So it was inevitable that the knight's face would be hazy.

The knight listened silently to my mentor's words, not confirming nor refuting any of his claims.

"For that reason, the village needs a ritual to unite the three parts of a person. Especially a Mystic Code or spell to remove Gray's mind and soul from her body."

My mentor picked up the dagger.

Was this the Mystic Code?

My mentor narrowed his eyes and examined it briefly before he continued.

“However, [someone] interfered with this step. Let’s assume that that person is a ‘he’. This person is a mage with a detailed understanding of the three elements of a human being, and has been watching this village for a long time.”

There was no need to ask who he was talking about.

It was Dr. Heartless. As he was the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft (Norwich), his knowledge on the subject was guaranteed.

“He also induced one of the villagers.”

The strange noise sounded again. It was now noticeably louder and more frequent. However, the people around us still took no notice of it. To what point would these irregularities continue? No, perhaps they wouldn’t stop until they covered this entire world.

“...Sir, the noise... keeps spreading.”

“The answer is right there. (TN: Alternatively, the answer is at hand?)”

I heard the strain in his voice. A drop of sweat trickled down the side of his face. He probably didn’t have a positive outlook on the situation, either. In fact, I think that he simply betted everything on this.

—“Find the mystery that you must solve. That is the only way you can reach the end, Lord El-Melloi II.”

It was the mystery that Zepia had given us.

I didn’t know why I was so sure of it, but I knew that was what my mentor was attempting to solve.

“It was necessary for ‘him’ to have an accomplice, because even for someone like him, dodging the magecraft alarm system completely would be difficult. So you could say that it was only natural for him to look for an accomplice in the village.”

My mentor had said before that Heartless made incidents get buried in darkness. It seemed that he was already used to secretly hiring accomplices.

“And that’s how he managed to receive hints about the ritual in the village. In turn, the person who provided this information received from him the means to disrupt the resurrection of King Arthur.”

Hearing my mentor’s words, the wrinkles at the old woman’s brow deepened.

“So you’re saying that the accomplice was Magdalena?”

“Could it be anyone else?”

My mentor’s assertion caused a vein to rise on the old woman’s forehead.

“But Magdalena isn’t even a mage! Unlike Gray, she’s a failure that didn’t become King Arthur’s body! How can someone like her disrupt the ritual without a bit of assistance from a mage!?”

“Doesn’t she have the perfect means to intervene, in the form of the central focus of this ritual?”

“...You mean, Gray?”

My mentor shifted his gaze from the furious old woman to me.

“...Gray, you were there when I said that it wasn’t just manipulating Magical Energy and casting spells, everything

from eating, sleeping, and even excretion is closely related to magecraft and mystery, right? (*TN: That's an absolute mess of a sentence*)"

I remembered.

It was when we were at the Twin Towers of Ilsema.

I had also thought of myself back then.

—After my father's death, my mother had started managing my life more fervently than ever. Not only for sleep and prayer, but also even [the order in which I ate my food or how I put on my clothes]. Naturally, my attitude towards my surroundings was influenced by her.

My mentor had said before that this was also a type of spell.

Transforming the macrocosmos of the world by making it mirror changes in the microcosmos of life. This was, undoubtedly, a type of magecraft. Guiding the tidal currents of the earth and the movement of the stars into the tiny vessel of a human body was a way to make greater mystery possible.

"There should have been something close to the potential to become King Arthur in your mother. It's only natural for that to be the case. She is your mother, after all. On top of that, the village has been cultivating this potential for quite a while. Ah, that is to say, this village is under the influence of magecraft that could cause these potentials to awaken. Therefore, the means of intervention that he taught her were very simple. By synchronizing the wavelength of the person with the highest affinity to the ritual and the wavelength of your mother, you can create a path to directly intervene into the spell."

"Synchronize...with me...?"

“Exactly. Your mother subtly shifted her wavelength to be in tune with yours through eating, sleeping, and everything else in your life.”

It was probably something similar to what Flat did. Magecraft intervention. From a technical point of view, this might be even more sophisticated.

“Though the means itself is straightforward, in practice, it is not that easy to pull off. It’s actually a difficult act that requires so much perseverance that even a real mage would complain about it. Not a single detail can be overlooked in order to completely synchronize the wavelength of her mutated daughter to her own. If we use food as an example, the difference of a couple of grams would affect the accuracy of the spell, and even the amount of bites taken would need to be managed. Imagine that, but for every hour of every day. It would require a stunning amount of energy to be able to do this without being able to ask the other person for help.”

“.....”

My body shook.

My mentor’s words were only processed by my ears. My brain had not managed to comprehend the meaning behind it at all. However, I could not help but realize that this was the truth. Every feeling that I had once held for my mother reversed, along with a feeling of pain as intense as if my skin was being peeled off.

“However, she succeeded. She somehow managed to succeed. The next step was to follow what Heartless had written down on the evidence board. Though the spell was complicated, it wouldn’t be difficult to perform as long as she had synchronized herself well. What happened then was that two sets of parameters were inserted into the unstable

mind of King Arthur. One was the parameters of the mind, and the other were those of your mother. Though it seemed like King Arthur on the surface, something similar to your mother's parameters were hiding deep within. The Husk King herself probably never realized it until the end."

Was that the reason why Heartless had approached the village before he left?

My mentor raised the ancient dagger that he had just picked up. "Is this dagger the Mystic Code used in the ritual?" He asked the old woman.

"...Indeed. This is a Mystic Code capable of separating the soul and the mind from the body, called Erosion."

"If that's the case, the answer is simple. During the First Cycle, Magdalena arrived here early and took the place of her daughter, stabbing the dagger into her own body. Then, the unstable mind of King Arthur was forcibly dragged into that soulless, mindless body. ...However, Magdalena first stabbed herself with a regular dagger. Even King Arthur wouldn't be able to do anything against being placed into a dead body. She had to die."

"...W-wh-" The old woman could not finish her sentence. I didn't know how much the other villagers knew, but they still panicked with the old woman. They couldn't understand what the First Cycle or the Second Cycle meant, so I guess it was inevitable that they acted this way.

No, actually, I could no longer discern their expressions anymore.

strange noise(*TN: Jiji...jiji in katakana, again*)... the sound of the burning world had already reached the level of a din. It wasn't just that. The [cracks] that had appeared on the swamp and the temple had spread to the villagers.

“Gray, you can feel this noise, yes?”

I nodded in response to my mentor’s question.

“...Y-yes.”

“In the words of that director of the Atlas Institute, the stage has discovered a contradiction. If the stage cannot hold against it, the reenactment loses its meaning. If the foundations collapse, we must start from the beginning. Therefore, we need to arrive here before it collapses. Ah, this reenactment really is beautifully made. Even I have doubted countless times that this was actually the past. However, that is not the case. Since this place is not the past, there must be things that cannot be concealed. In this case, that would be death.”

“...Death... cannot be concealed...”

During the First Cycle, Father Fernando had died. The Husk King—or perhaps I should say, my mother, who gave her body to her, also died.

Only the truths of that timeline could not be concealed in this reenactment, no matter what. That was why Father Fernando’s body would suddenly appear, and why the Husk King would die in my mother’s body. Perhaps, before their death, both of them had seen their own doppelgängers.

“Well then, to conclude,” my mentor said in a slightly more powerful voice. “Like I just said, in the real world, there is no way for the mind to retain its shape for a long period of time. Sir Kay can only materialize because of Add, his true form. Even so, there is no guarantee that he can sustain it for longer than a day. ...However, for the Husk King, she awoke at the same time Gray had began her transformation. That is to say, ten years ago.”

My mentor paused briefly before looking to the side.

“Well then, how do [you] maintain your own existence?”

“.....”

“...Oi, what’s going on?” The knight(Sir Kay) yelled at the new arrival.

I didn’t know when, but the corpse of the Husk King— or rather, what was once the Husk King had stood up.

Was this still the same Husk King as before?

I could not sense a trace of life in her as she stood there quietly with her head hung. Though her face was the same as my mother’s, she gave me the feeling of an entirely different being.

The victim who was thought to have been killed but turned out to still be alive...Though this happened quite frequently in mystery novels, this was different.

“Husk King— No. That’s not the right name to use anymore. After your reboot, you are neither Magdalena nor the mind of King Arthur, but something that consumed large amounts of Mana to continue calculating,” my mentor revealed.

“[You, are Logos ReAct.]”

One of the Seven Superweapons of the Atlas Institute.

The knight(Sir Kay), who had inherited Add’s memories, did not expect that name to appear here either, and did not make an effort to hide his shock.

“Ha? So you’re saying that the Atlas Institute’s superweapon is a person?”

“Not exactly. To be precise, she is the avatar of Logos ReAct in this world,” my mentor said, looking toward the object that stood there. “I see. Since it’s the superweapon of the

Atlas Institute, it should be able to duplicate the mind of King Arthur. Such a task should probably be completable, even if it only had the excess energy outside its original functions. After all, those superweapons were created to save humanity from destruction, but are also capable of destroying the world.”

“.....”

The object that was once the Husk King did not speak.

I didn’t know when it had happened, but her face had become as hazy as Sir Kay’s. Was that the face of the mind of King Arthur, or that of the incarnation of Logos ReAct?

“Indeed. This is not the past, or a time loop. Therefore, the Husk King’s death can only happen at a fixed time. The answer to this endless loop that begins and ends with death is already clear.”

He inhaled.

“This place is a grave,” my mentor proclaimed. “A tiny world after death, constructed by Logos ReAct!”

His declaration echoed in the temple.

I could not understand the meaning behind what he said at all. Instead, as if in response to his words, the noise grew louder. I felt like my eardrums were going to burst.

Everything in my field of vision was being torn apart. Every inch of the swamp, the temple, and the villagers looked like a badly scarred photo. If I inserted my fingers into those cracks, would it kill everything?

“You heard that, right?” My mentor yelled. Loudly, as if he was trying to reach the other end of the universe(sky). “You heard me, Atlas!”

His voice pierced through cacophony of noise.

“The mystery has been solved! Summer is over! Show yourself, Zepia Eltnam Atlasia!”

It was as if those words had split the world open.

In an instant, everything disappeared.

The swamp, the temple, the Black Madonna, the old woman, the villagers, Bersac, and Illumia.

And then.

In a way that was fitting for the dawn in a certain sense, a veil of darkness had been lifted, that man stood there, naturally, as if he had been waiting for this moment.

-End of Part 1 of Chapter 4 of Book 7-

Chapter 4, Part 3:

It was a strange space.

There was nothing else apart from the large number of crystal balls floating in the air. In the darkness, I reached down and felt the floor, which had a texture unlike that of dirt, metal, or resin.

I forced down the uneasiness that came from everything in my line of sight suddenly changing, and heard the crisp sound of applause.

“Congratulations on reaching the truth, Lord El-Melloi II.”

The man stood there with his eyes closed.

Rather than saying that his age was difficult to discern, it was more like he was an organism that had already transcended that concept. No, it wasn't even right to call

him an organism. They were called Dead Apostles precisely for that reason, as they had deviated from everything that living organisms would do.

Apostles of death.

—“That is what you must destroy. That, and only that.”

Did what Bersac had said to me when I was still a grave keeper apply here? Could Dead Apostles and spirits (*TN: Alternatively, ghosts*) be regarded the same way?

Everything around us had disappeared, from the temple that had risen from below the ground, to the dead Husk King, Bersac, Illumia, Trimmau, the villagers, and my mother.

No, they had not completely disappeared. All the things I just described were now shown in the floating crystal balls.

Each crystal ball of the large number in the room showed the place we had just been in from a different angle. Everyone was completely frozen in place. This abnormal scene made me feel like everything I had experienced up to now was only a scene from a movie.

“Huh, I’ve also been dragged here. I guess that’s inevitable since Add’s my true form, but don’t you think I’ve worked without pay for too long? Back in the day, I would’ve earned a piece of land for this. Ah, but don’t actually give me a piece of land. I won’t be able to go around wooing maidens that way.”

I breathed a sigh of relief as I realized that the chatterbox of a knight was still here, and tightened my grip on my scythe.

And then, there was my mentor.

His eyes had not left his opponent, not even for a moment.

“Zepia Eltnam Atasia. Was the answer I gave correct?”

“You could say that,” Zepia said, nodding curtly. “In modern terms, you’ve passed the level. You interacted with Logos ReAct splendidly, and managed to make the world eject you by solving its riddle. Ah, if we ignore the Husk King whose true form is Logos ReAct, if someone who understands the structure of the world enters the reenactment, it will create a paradox.”

“...So that’s why you weren’t in that world.”

“Basically, yes,” Zepia admitted.

“Um, Sir, Miss Trimmau...” I interjected quietly, watching their conversation.

“That Trimmau is just a creation of Logos ReAct, based on the Trimmau that Reines left behind in the First Cycle. The real Trimmau is probably pouring tea for Reines right now.”

Hearing my mentor’s response, I breathed a sigh of relief.

If that was the case, what about Bersac and Illumia? When we returned to the village, these people had already disappeared. And like Father Fernando, who had died already in the First Cycle, my mother...

Just as I was thinking of that, I heard the sound of footsteps.

“Professor!”

“Sir!”

The two blonde teenagers ran over, shouting in unison.

It was Flat and Svin.

“I knew you could do it!”

“Flat, that comment wasn’t necessary! How could our teacher not succeed? The fact that you even doubted that

he would is rude! Even if you didn't mind other people's business, he would have solved it perfectly anyway!"

"What do you mean? Weren't you the one who said that we should help him with the expression of a puppy being abandoned in the rain, Le Chien-kun?"

"T-that's just me acting on his instructions, because he said it's important to have good backup as a mage! Also, how is my expression related at all?"

"Your students are quite talented. I envy you," Zepia said in a pretentious manner as he watched the two argue.

"I think so as well," my mentor replied calmly.

Everyone was here.

My mentor, me, the knight(Sir Kay), the two teenagers.

And finally, Zepia.

"Well then, as the person who arrived at the answer, what do you seek from me, Lord El-Melloi II? Is it the whereabouts of Heartless? Or the information the Atlas Institute has on the Holy Grail War?" Zepia asked.

The tone of the director of the Atlas Institute who had sent us to the Second Cycle was unbelievably warm, as if he was congratulating us from the bottom of his heart.

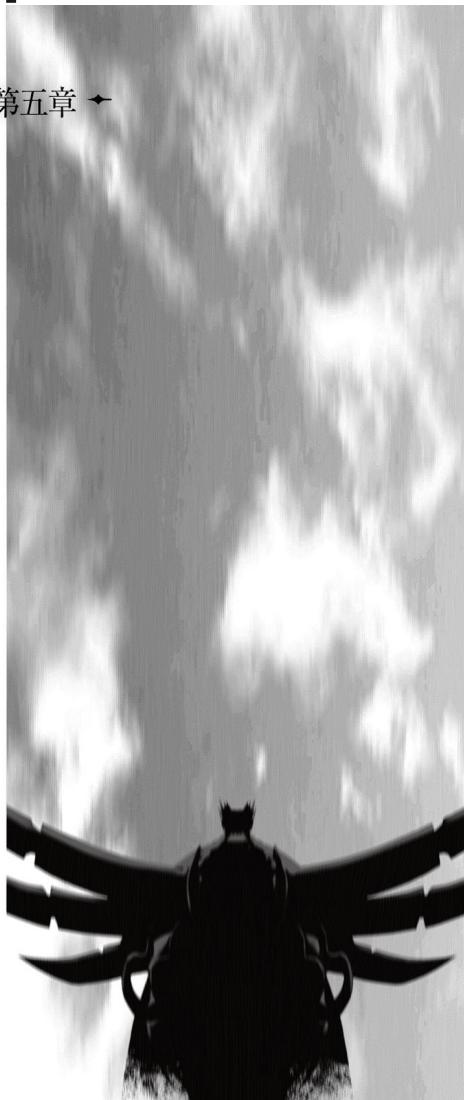
However.

"...No," my mentor said. "I haven't arrived at any kind of answer. The mystery that I must solve is still to come, Zepia Eltnam Atasia, ancient king of the Atlas Institute."

-End of Part 3 of Chapter 4 of Book 7-

Chapter 5, Part 1:

♦ 第五章 ♦



Suddenly, I felt as if the air itself had changed fundamentally. I even had a hallucination of sparks flying between Zepia and my mentor.

“...Huh,” the knight(Sir Kay) mumbled, as if he found it amusing.

My throat hurt.

This intense pain was caused by my anxiety.

Though it was rare, my mentor would sometimes have a very belligerent expression. Though he was usually cautious

almost to the point of cowardice, in the right situation, his words and actions would become almost provocative.

For example, when he was up against the Grand puppeteer.

And also, when he confronted the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft, Heartless.

Perhaps it was so he could make a risky move to unsettle the enemy and try to figure out what was going on. But this wasn't all. Though he'd probably cite that as the reason if you asked him, there must be something else there.

Yes. ...It must be because that was who he originally was.

Reckless, imprudent, and passionate. Sometimes, a mage like that would appear uncontrolledly in front of my eyes. Though I had never seen what my mentor was like in the past, I could not help but imagine him as he stood alongside that Heroic Spirit named Iskandar.

I suppose that to him, that would be his youth.

Zepia was silent for a moment before he spoke again.

“...The mystery is still to come, you say?”

“Yes,” my mentor confirmed. “I’m not playing some sort of word game. Since I said that the Second Cycle was some sort of grave, there must be some meaning behind what I said. If this is a grave, then finding out [who it belongs to] is incredibly important.”

I thought I saw Zepia freeze for a second. Perhaps I was just seeing things.

As if he had seen an opening, my mentor continued.

“However, you hastily reminded us of what we were entitled to. Why?”

“Is it difficult to believe that I would just choose to do so?”

“Yes. You don’t do anything that doesn’t need to be done. Though what you say might have been difficult for us to understand, that was simply because we did not have the capacity to understand it at the time. Think about it. Why would someone like you stay in this village?”

“Is that strange?”

“I’ve always thought so. You’ve said before that the technology of the Atlas Institute allows someone to hold command over it from anywhere in the world. Also, unlike the other members, you do not need to follow the rules of the Atlas Institute and stay within its gates,” he said, reiterating what Zepia had said. “However, this alone doesn’t constitute enough of a reason for you to stay in this village, especially.”

...Ah. True, just because he was capable wasn’t a reason why he would do it.

Even if one of the seven superweapons was really hidden in this village, that shouldn’t have been a reason why the director would visit here himself. What’s more, it had been around half a year since we left the village in the First Cycle. I couldn’t imagine why he needed to stay here for so long.

“No. This entire incident is too roundabout. Was it actually you who sent us to that Second Cycle?”

I began to recall what had happened before we were transported to the Second Cycle.

We had returned here in search of clues about Heartless, and had met Zepia in the hut outside the empty village.

—“Ah, has it started? One of the superweapons of Atlas is hidden in this village.” —“It’s one of the seven

superweapons of the Atlas Institute. Its specialty is reenactment. I suppose I am already quite familiar with it. Though it doesn't have an official name, it is commonly called Logos ReAct."

These words were explanations.

Thinking back, that was probably the most basic preparations he had planned for us before we entered the Second Cycle.

"You did not activate it yourself. You simply [knew that it would happen]."

"...I see."

"Though, if I'm just bringing up what happened in the past, I don't imagine you would admit it. Therefore, please allow me to organize everything that happened during the First Cycle. —Sir Kay."

The knight (Sir Kay) shrugged somewhat pretentiously.

"I didn't think that my name would come up in a boring conversation between mages. I would very much like to get out of here right now, but whatever. What do you want from me?"

"I don't think I've misremembered, but just in case, I'd like you to confirm something. You inherited Add's memories, right?"

"Yeah, I guess you could say that. That's why I'm not quite the same as when I was still alive."

"If that's the case, do you remember what Father Fernando did on the third day of the First Cycle, after I met Gray?"

"...Hmm," the knight replied, stroking his chin. "I remember seeing him sometime in the evening. Then, Gray and I— or

maybe I should say, Gray and Add returned home as usual. Later, someone slipped some sedative into her food.”

“If that’s the case, then we should assume that the temple rose from the water in the First Cycle as well, letting the Husk King and the bone soldiers come up to the surface. I presume that Father Fernando was killed during the conflicts then.”

Was that where the corpse Bersac saw came from?

I suppose Father Fernando had not been as careful as he was during the Second Cycle.

The only reason why they had gone underground and fought with the Husk King in the Second Cycle was because of our actions. Otherwise, they would only have rushed to the swamp after observing some irregularities. It was impossible that they could have imagined that those monsters would be there. It wouldn’t be surprising if they were killed by the bone soldiers that they could have dealt with if they were prepared.

“Since Sister Illumia’s corpse wasn’t discovered around that area, that means she probably survived the clash. However, either way, she wasn’t able to stop the villagers from meeting the Husk King,” my mentor said, explaining the events.

My mentor had not noticed it back then, but the reason why the Church noticed the irregularity was not just because my mentor wasn’t very good at perceiving these things, but also because they had made preparations long ago. They were sent here to monitor the village, after all, so they might even have installed devices especially for this purpose.

“Everything else went exactly like I said. Before she became the body of the mind of King Arthur, Gray’s mother killed herself and died along with the Husk King. She probably arrived there just before the villagers did, hid Gray somewhere, put on the mask, and carried out her plan. I just don’t know if it’s the mask that belonged to the Husk King, or a copy of it that she prepared.”

The villagers and the old woman who worshipped King Arthur never even thought to take off the mask.

“Before it happened, your mother probably explained part of the situation to Bersac, so he could find you successfully and take you away. Though, looking at the situation, Bersac probably wasn’t aware of the details. She might have just asked him to save Gray for her.”

And that was how Bersac ended up entrusting me to my mentor.

Everyone already knows what happened after that. After I came to London, I gradually managed to pull myself together, and experienced a multitude of cases with my mentor and the students of the El-Melloi Classroom.

“...Mother...”

There was a weight at my chest.

The feeling of having everything I knew get completely overturned that I had felt when I had heard that my mother was the culprit surged back, and I felt like my heart was being set on fire.

“...Why...?”

Whydunit.

Why would something like that happen? Did she throw away her own life for nothing? Wasn't she one of the villagers who fervently looked forward to the resurrection of King Arthur?

"Isn't it obvious?" To my question, my mentor responded with the most clichéd answer in the world, which, at the same time, was also an answer that I would never have been able to reach on my own. "It's because she loves you, Gray."

Of course.

What my mentor talked about was something that I should have never been able to obtain.

No, that wasn't true.

I knew what it was, once. Before my face had become this one.

Back then, the world had been bright, and the stars had shone. We had laughed together countless times in the beautiful song of the birds. Why had I forgotten all of this? No matter how many times I tried to deny it, these things would never disappear from my heart.

And even if I did, my mother would never forget it. She wouldn't forget a single second.

"I... should be the one who understands my mother the most... and I..."

"Your mother cannot reveal this matter to anyone, not even you," my mentor said. "Therefore, your mother pretended to be the most fanatical worshipper out of all the others in the village. If she didn't do that, she wouldn't have gotten the Mystic Code used to separate the body from the mind and the soul. That is why she needed to put on an act so

convincing that the old woman wouldn't have even a moment of doubt."

It must have been such a tedious task.

How much determination must the task have taken? What kind of persistence must she have had to endure it for such a long time? Even now, I could not imagine how those years must have felt.

"That is why we must know the reason."

My mentor's voice was not gentle.

It was impossible for someone's voice to be gentle when they were revealing the cruel truth. When someone is forcing someone else to confess, it is inevitable that their voice would be harsh, just like what my mentor was doing now.

"Otherwise, we would miss something more important than that. The same applies to you too, Zepia."

He turned to look at the alchemist of the Atlas Institute again.

"You're saying that I have a similar reason."

"Exactly," my mentor said, nodding.

"Well then, what would that reason be?"

"Could it be anything else other than the Contract of Atlas?"

I could feel Svin stiffen behind me.

As an honors student, he had probably heard of it before. Or, perhaps Zepia had brought it up. O recalled the conversation that I had witnessed between Zepia and my mentor.

—“Are you referring to the seven contracts that are said to be scattered around the world?”

—“Yes, the seven contracts. The Atlas Institute is obliged to assist anyone who activates them.”

“The seven contracts of the Atlas Institute. You’ve mentioned it before, right? If someone activates them, the Atlas Institute has to come to their aid. And the reason why you decided to do something so roundabout and ineffective can only be so you [wouldn’t go against the contract.]”

“To not go against the contract?”

My mentor nodded lightly. “If the contents of the contract matched what you wanted to do, you would use the opposite of a roundabout approach. If you simply wanted to drive us away, it wouldn’t be difficult at all, considering the abilities of the Atlas Institute. And yet, you didn’t, which means that you do not wish to become our enemy, but cannot help us either. ...Yes. Therefore, after calculating countless results, you managed to induce our actions to just [happen to coincide] with your goals.”

“...Hm.” Zepia raised one of his eyebrows. “That can hardly be called deductive reasoning. Speculating on the basis of guesses is hardly ever a good idea. It will influence the quality of the script, you know?”

“Sorry for that, but I’m not a detective. ...However, this time, I do have a piece of evidence.”

“Evidence?”

“I brought it up earlier. The evidence is who the grave belongs to.”

Once again, my mentor returned the conversation to the original topic.

I didn't know if he was doing it on purpose, but managing to suddenly turn the focus back to something after going off in a completely different direction was one of my mentor's talents.

"The answer to that question is obvious, too. If you think of whose death the noise started appearing around, everything becomes clear. That is the grave of the Husk King, and the grave of Gray's mother, but also [the grave of Logos ReAct,]" my mentor said, slowly, as if he was approaching his prey. "Ah, of course, Logos ReAct cannot die. An item(*TN: Alternatively, prop*) is an item. It does not have life, and though there are religious customs related to animism all over the world such as tales of how they would burn objects to stop them from becoming evil spirits(*TN: Hmm. Yōkai, actually. Which are, uh... Spirit entities? Ghosts? Goblins? Monsters? Demons?*), but those don't apply here."

"....."

"It was Logos ReAct that recreated the mind of King Arthur. Even if Gray's mother combined herself with the Husk King, this is still true. And then, the death of the Husk King sent Logos ReAct a different set of data," my mentor said calmly to Zepia, who remained silent. "That is to say, Logos React, which can never die, was given the information of 'death'."

Death, given to something without an understanding of the concept.

Was what happened here really such a bizarre phenomenon?

"However, because it is an item(prop), Logos ReAct did not die. It died, and yet, it is not dead. This paradox caused an immeasurable load on that weapon. Though its computational capacity seems infinite to most people, even it could not explain and solve this paradox. And what

happens next? It is said that each of the Seven Superweapons of the Atlas Institute is capable of destroying humanity. So what would happen if Logos ReAct malfunctioned?"

I blinked.

I could not imagine this at all. However, for a mage, it seemed to be something important, as even Flat let out an exclamation as if he had come across an unexpectedly good game, and then covered his mouth with his hands. Only the knight (Sir Kay) remained unaffected, and he yawned impatiently.

No.

Actually, I had some kind of idea.

"...Is that why all the people disappeared when we came back to the village?"

"Yes. It wouldn't be too much of a stretch to say that they were all pulled into the malfunctioning Logos ReAct."

Hearing my mentor's response, I swallowed.

A malfunctioning weapon that was said to be capable of destroying the world. If it really could, wouldn't we have been lucky that it only affected a single village?

"...And that's why you have continued to watch over this village alone," my mentor announced to Zepia.

"Huh?" I couldn't help but exclaim. My mentor did not mind me and continued.

"Perhaps you have kept watch here alone, guarding the world. At least, I think so. Because before you, this person named Zepia, was an alchemist or a powerful Dead Apostle, you were the director of the Atlas Institute. So, what say

you? (*TN: I couldn't find a better way to put this. I know it sounds incredibly weird*) Since I've already revealed it to this point, it wouldn't go against the contract to admit to it, would it?"

"...Not bad, Lord El-Melloi II. You really are an interesting person." Zepia's eyes were closed, and his shoulders shook from laughter. "As you have guessed, the Atlas Institute lent Logos React out to someone based on the contract. Before the resurrection of King Arthur is successfully achieved or definitively declared a failure, you could only watch. That is why it malfunctioned."

Ah, this was also a whydunit. It was why he had no other choice. Why he had to stay here, alone in this village. It was the only possible result of the chain of events.

However, it was still strange.

There were still parts that had not been explained.

"...Why do you have to do this? The contract didn't mention anything about having to continue surveilling Logos ReAct, right?" I could not help but ask. Though I thought that I would be ignored, Zepia took my question seriously.

"Didn't your teacher say it just then? Because this is the obligation of the Atlas Institute. We have given ourselves the task of guarding over the human race, so that they can continue inhabiting this world far into the future. That is what millennia of our institute's alchemists have dedicated their lives to."

Zepia's words were full of sincerity.

Though the Atlas Institute and the Clock Tower were both associations of mages, they were vastly different. The Clock Tower was a place infinitely dedicated to personal gain, while the Atlas Institute had completely abandoned all

individual desires. Which was a more correct path for a person to take, I wonder? At the same time, the decisions that he made based on the contract, which seemed more like that of a machine than a person, gave me an uneasy feeling.

“In this situation, we can only take action once we have judged that the contract cannot be fulfilled. In order for that to happen... Let’s see, more than half of Wales would have to be involved in this disaster for the criteria to be met. I am here to be the first to witness that moment,” he admitted, without a trace of hesitation.

Like before, his decisions did not contain a single bit of emotion. It was as if he was a cold, lifeless void, structured in the shape of a person.

“...Are you saying that we should destroy Logos ReAct?”

“No, I never said that. According to the contract, I don’t have the authority to say that. I am merely confirming your speculations, Lord. The destruction of half of Wales is of little consequence to me. Such a degree of disruption would activate neither Gaia nor Alaya (*TN: Both are types of the Counter Force, which is the manifestation of the will/the self-protection mechanism of the earth. Alaya is a part of Gaia that is only for mankind, except it kind of separated itself like how humanity separated itself from nature...? Gaia’s also called the Counter Force of the Stars and Alaya’s also called the Counter Force of Humanity.*).”

At this, Zepia stopped speaking and looked up at the sky.

Though I said that, there wasn’t a sky in this space. There was only a hazy canopy of ivory white.

Suddenly, a giant [crack] appeared on that canopy.

“Huh.”

Though the sound it made was different to the one from before, it was also similar. But why would this sound appear in a place that wasn't the Second Cycle?

“—My apologies, but I must warn you,” Zepia said. “It seems that the malfunctioning Logos ReAct is trying to intervene to cross over here from the other side.”

“From the other side?”

“That is still unknown territory, and it has never done anything this drastic until now. I suppose she— or whatever you want to call it now is a little more committed about this than I expected. Perhaps it’s because of the fusion with the Husk King (*TN: Actually it’s a lot less direct than that but I think that’s what he’s talking about?*),” Zepia said plainly, as if he was announcing the results of some kind of research. “Ah, if you think you’re just being messed with by an obnoxious scriptwriter for the sake of the audience’s entertainment, you’re free to leave. You’ve already solved the mystery, after all, and I will open the gates for you to leave. Well, like I said, go and demonstrate the knowledge which you are so obsessed with. I can buy enough time for us to not get caught up in its malfunction, and the damage won’t spread all the way to London, where the Clock Tower is.”

“What about the other option?”

“...What do you mean?”

My mentor narrowed his eyes slightly at Zepia, who had paused for a beat before he asked that question.

“Would it go against the contract? I thought so. If you told us that such an option was possible, it wouldn’t be a coincidence, but a straightforward invitation for us to deal

with Logos ReAct. But since you haven't said no, that means that it's not completely impossible."

My mentor turned to look at me.

"Sir?"

"Gray. In the Second Cycle, I said that this was your case. So the decision is in your hands."

"Yes."

"My apologies. Though I've said all that bluster, for my own selfish reasons, I want to see this case to the end. This is the wrong choice to make, both as a mage, and as the Lord of the El-Melloi faction. However, I can't ignore this issue, no matter what."

"....."

Why?

Why would I feel so ashamed at such a critical moment?

"Why do you want to?"

"I can't tell you, but I hope you can entrust me with your life."

"...You really are an idiot, Sir. Please don't say something like that with a look of guilt on your face."

I couldn't help but smile. My brain still had not fully processed anything, from my mother's motive, to Logos ReAct, and to half of Wales being in danger. I wasn't about to recover from such an impact anytime soon, but the obvious answer to that question slipped out of my mouth with out a moment of hesitation.

"Didn't I entrust my life to you a long time ago?"

Hearing my response, the knight put a hand to his hazy face, as if he was letting out a silent exclamation of surprise.

Just as he seemed to want to say something, a voice came from behind me.

“Now’s not the time to retreat, Professor!” Flat said, jumping up like a rabbit with his hands in the air. “We haven’t passed the level yet! Come on, it’s not everyday you a hidden boss fight, so how can we just walk away?”

“I plan on going along with what sir and Gray-tan... Miss Gray decide on doing,” Svin said after clearing his throat. “Also, I’ve been asked to help out with my strength. It would go against the contract to not use what you’ve lent properly.”

“You still remember,” my mentor said with a wry smile.

Hearing that, the knight (Sir Kay) finally protested loudly.

“Oi, are you people stupid? Have you crushed and boiled your brains dunked them in giants’ liquor? He just told you that you could leave, so why the heck do you still want to get into more trouble, especially after all that? I’m not some girl who pulled a sword out of a rock even though she had the choice not to, and I certainly don’t plan on running off to hell like an idiot.”

“But, you’ll still accompany us there, right, Sir Kay?” I couldn’t help but say.

Hearing this, a low groan escaped from the knight’s mouth.

“...Why would you think so?”

“Because you’re also Add.”

“...You might as well say that because you’re holding my true form, I can’t escape at all, even if I wanted to. If you

feel sorry for me, hurry up and get out of here. But that's never going to happen, huh?"

"Exactly."

Seeing my nod, the knight's head drooped in disappointment.

My mentor spoke to Zepia again after confirming this.

"Is it fine with you if we help you stop the malfunctioning Logos ReAct?"

"Are you serious?" Zepia said with a frown.

"Of course I am. Beside that, you've already calculated that answer, haven't you."

"Naturally. The possibility isn't high, but it is good enough to be a candidate for a choice that you could make. Everything you have done up to this point points to this answer. That is why I chose to make contact with you at the risk of violating the contract. However, I still don't understand."

The alchemist of the Atlas Institute shook his head for the first time.

"Why does such an option exist? With your level of intelligence, you should understand how unreasonable this is, and how dangerous Logos ReAct is. You're going to say some ridiculous line about how this is for the sake of Wales, are you?"

Zepia became more talkative, perhaps because this was difficult to understand.

"Or, is it because of that other option you mentioned? Even if it really exists, it only does on a purely theoretical level. As a Lord, do you really want to risk your life for such an unreasonable choice? It's not only your own life, but also the

lives of your student and your disciple. As far as I know, isn't it in your nature to avoid involving students in your own battles?"

"As I said earlier, I'm not a detective," my mentor replied in a serious tone of voice. "I don't believe that you can find the truth by eliminating all of the illogicalities, because I am a mage. And I've already grown tired of always picking the best solution."

The air was full of surprise, but only briefly.

Hearing his response, the alchemist began to laugh.

"Hahahahahaha! You don't plan on eliminating the illogicalities, you say? Are you a madman? A fool? An imbecile? I was wondering what you would say. I never thought it would be something so stupid and meaningless! What do you plan on doing, abandoning the optimal solution, as a creature that can live at least three hundred years even without the use of magecraft? And you're planning to face the malfunctioning Logos ReAct with this kind of puny reasoning and pathetic physical strength? (*TN: says Zepia, as I look through a list of synonyms of the word idiot*)"

He sounded like he found it laughable from the bottom of his heart.

The space began to [crack apart] like the temple had, and the jeering laughter of the alchemist kept on echoing and echoing until he came to his conclusion.

"I see, that way, everything makes sense!"

"What the hell does that mean?!" The knight (Sir Kay) yelled reflexively.

“Ah, yes. Is that the case. How ridiculous. How boring. That is why I have abandoned these thoughts, and why I have stopped worrying. And you plan on continue advancing with these thoughts. I see. How boring. I see. How—”

At this, he suddenly changed a topic.

“No. I have already chosen to watch from the side, so it would be unfitting for me to continue. Let’s get beck to our main topic. You are free to stop Logos Re Act, but just as Lord El-Melloi II deduced, as per the contract, I cannot assist you,” the alchemist said calmly. “However, I am allowed to adjust the stage. Though it might not give you an advantage, it might help you relax somewhat.”

“Thank you for your help.”

Zepia raised his hands, and traced an arc in the sky.

“The time for the curtain to fall has come!”

I heard the sound of glass being smashed into pieces. It was as if we had been standing in an invisible palace of ice. I felt a dizziness a hundred times stranger than the feeling caused by being weightless in an elevator.

“Oh, yes, one more thing. Ah, since you have already decided on involving yourself, I don’t think telling you this would violate the contract. Your guess is correct, Lord El-Melloi II. [The deaths of Gray’s mother and Father Fernando have not been determined(*TN: Alternatively, fixed? Confirmed?*) yet.]”

“—What?!”

The shock was so great I felt as if it passed straight through me, as a silent voice sounded in my head.

—Code: Logos React, Unauthorized Activation.

—Distortion Value: B.

—Extracted Time Period: ████

—UnLogos Program activated. Began replacing targets.

—Full process, Clear. Atlas Institute Human Order Extension Experiment Number 5, starting.

*

After the mages of the Clock Tower disappeared, Zepia sighed.

Even if it was just for a second, he needed to slow down the loss of control caused by the malfunction. Even though the contract forbade him from directly taking action against Logos ReAct, he was still allowed to indirectly prompt someone like Lord El-Melloi II.

Of course, his sixth parallel mind was telling him that there was a danger that he was still violating the contract, but the second and the third had more priority, and they claimed that this was within the regulations. The contradictions between his thoughts caused his functions to decrease by a couple of percentage points, but there was nothing he could do about it.

In the past six months, Zepia had continuously touched these crystal balls, manipulating nearly countless parameters.

In a certain sense, this was a technique more delicate than the intervention that Flat used. Even if it was another alchemist of the Atlas Institute, anyone other than him would have their brains instantly burned out by the load. If he wasn't able to take such a load, though, it would have been meaningless for him to become a Dead Apostle.

He moved his fingers like usual, standing alone in that space.

“Is that the case. How ridiculous. How boring.”

The words flowed forth from his lips like the lyrics to a song. Those were the same things he had mocked Lord El-Melloi II's lines with.

However, this time, he continued, as if, for the first time in decades, he reunited his first love, whose face he had already forgotten.

"I see... how— cute(TN: Alternatively, endearing? lovable? Precious? What is ███ supposed to mean in this context?)."
-End of Part 1 of Chapter 5 of Book 7-

Chapter 5, Part 2:

I felt the wind caress my face. This was neither not the summer of the Second Cycle, nor the winter in real life.

The sky was overcast. Several stone pillars had been erected on the ground around us. Each one had a name carved into it, and they stood there like abandoned children, casting their sparse shadows onto the dark earth. Though it was a lot larger than the one in the village, the stagnation of the air and the damp smell of the dirt were familiar to me.

It was a graveyard.

Was this the place that Zepia had chosen for us, the grave of my mother, the Husk King, and Logos ReAct?

However, what occupied my brain now was not the environment.

"Sir!" I yelled. "What did he mean when he said that the deaths of my mother and Father Fernando had not been determined yet?"

“I was still in the hypothesis stage about this, but I didn’t want to let you down if it didn’t end up being true. Hmph, the Atlas Institute really ended up giving us something unexpected,” my mentor said with a wry smile. “Like he said, your mother’s death has not been determined yet.”

“...What does that mean?”

“Because Logos ReAct is still attempting to verify the deaths, the deaths of the people who died then have not been determined. They’re probably still being kept in a deep sleep resembling death somewhere inside Logos ReAct, along with the rest of the villagers. Though I’ve had my doubts about Father Fernando, I never thought that Zepia himself would confirm it.”

“...Ah.”

A strange feeling rose up in me.

I hadn’t talked that much with Father Fernando, but I did get a strange feeling of relief when I interacted with him, simply because he saw me as myself and not the body of King Arthur.

“So that’s why they haven’t been determined. The deaths of both my mother and Father Fernando.”

Hearing our conversation, the knight(Sir Kay) spoke up as he scratched his head.

“...Huh, so that’s what it is. Mages really do the strangest things. It is pretty interesting though. So what do you plan on doing next? Can you fix whatever piece of crap that Logos ReAct is? Actually, you probably have no chance with that kind of skill level. So it’ll be up to your students?”

“We’re doing neither. I suppose it’s for this that I managed to bring this back from the Second Cycle,” my mentor said,

as he took out a curved dagger.

It was Erosion.

The ancient Mystic Code that had separated my mother's body from her mind and her soul.

"This place has to be part of Logos ReAct's calculations. So people can bring their belongings with them." My mentor paused for a second before answering the knight's question. "I plan on using this Mystic Code to separate the mind of the dead Husk King from Logos ReAct."

"—!"

I was momentarily rendered speechless.

Indeed, it could work. After all, Erosion was made for this exact purpose. Theoretically, as soon as the Husk King's mind was removed from Logos ReAct, it should return to normal. However, it was only theoretical.

I didn't know if it could actually be fixed. Even if you removed an arrow from a wounded animal, it wouldn't recover completely. At most, it would just increase its chances of survival.

"What if... that won't be enough to fix it?"

"Then our only choice is to destroy it."

Hearing that determined voice, I could not help but swallow.

Either way, it would be an incredibly difficult task. We might not be able to keep our own lives, much less the lives of my mother and Father Fernando.

"Sir, Miss Gray, it's here," Svin said, with his nose twitching.

The woman(person) with a metal mask appeared in the center of the graveyard, a couple dozen meters away from

us.

“...Logos ReAct.”

“It feels so much like a dream.”

The woman removed her mask. She no longer looked like my mother. She didn’t look like me, either. Her face was hazy, like the knight(Sir Kay)’s. I supposed that was what she originally looked like.

“Yes, this is the original me.”

It was completely different.

This was completely different from the Husk King that we had met in the summer of the reenactment, which felt like less than an hour ago.

“Yes. I am the mind of King Arthur, the weapon forged by the Atlas Institute.”

As if she finally realized something, the woman raised her right hand. Darkness began to gather there, and took on a form.

“Yes. This lance is both Rhongomyniad, and Logos ReAct,” the faceless woman— Logos ReAct said, holding out the dark lance.

“Hey, that’s enough crap, don’t you think?” The knight complained.

If I had been a regular person with no idea of what was happening, just this cyclone of Magical Energy alone would be enough to cause me to pass out. And it wasn’t just that. Something had began to form beside Logos ReAct, in a similar way the lance had appeared.

After a few seconds, the darkness became two familiar figures.

“...Mr. Bersac,” I mumbled.

“...And Sister Illumia,” said the knight.

Intense animosity radiated off of the two people.

“I see, so the Logos ReAct is able to recreate the people it absorbed,” my mentor analyzed calmly. That meant that everything from people to items could be reconstructed through Logos ReAct’s will. “If that’s the case, Trimmau and Zepia won’t be able to get reconstructed. I guess we should count ourselves lucky.”

I couldn’t bring myself to listen to what he was saying anymore.

“Mr. Bersac!” I yelled.

“Ah, Gray. I’m still myself,” he replied, with the same deep voice that was so familiar to me.

Everything about him, from what he said to his slight nod, was exactly as usual. However, I could not let down my guard at all.

“You know, right? When I was reconstructed, my thought parameters were changed. No matter what I try to do, all I can think of now is killing you.”

“...Mr. Bersac.”

The grave keeper smiled a troubled smile as he looked at me. “Do whatever you have to. I’m just a reconstructed replica of Bersac Blackmore.”

He swung his axe towards me. The impact of my scythe blocking his stride spread throughout my entire body. I only

realized then exactly how much he had been holding back in the hundreds of times we had fought as part of my training.

“Alright, let me see what you’re capable of.”

With a roar, the spirit raven in Bersac’s hand flew into the air, and I was gradually dragged into the fight.

*

Similarly, Sister Illumia was facing off against the knight (Sir Kay).

“So you’re the same kind of thing huh? I don’t enjoy committing acts of violence against women much, though.”

“Is that so? Because I absolutely love beating up men. I can’t help but feel a bit vexed if I’m up against a cute girl, but that comes with its own joys. No matter how many times I see a face that’s to my liking twist, I’ll never get bored of it,” Sister Illumia said with a smile.

Her gauntlets cracked with purple electricity. The battle-hardened Executor looked even more stunning in the mysterious light.

“Yes. Now I know everything. Including how you are a mental model based on a knight from a long time ago. And why you were originally created.”

It was impossible to sense a trace of movement from her before she struck. The knight barely managed to dodge Illumia’s punch. Did that nun have the advantage in terms of physical ability? Though the knight had received a physical form through Add, his Spirit Origin (*TN: Alternatively, Saint Graph*) was not stable, and he could not do much more than a regular person. What he could achieve now was probably very different from what he could do as a summoned Servant.

“Hmph.” The knight uttered, as if he found this troublesome.

He was more accustomed to using the power of that lance to fight the Husk King. It was much harder for him to swindle his opponent when he was up against someone with Sister Illumia's speed. Thus, he was trapped in this battle which was difficult for him to win.

"Alright, let me see how a knight fights! Come on! And let me show you the power of the Lord's teachings!" The nun said as she laughed, letting arcs of electricity shoot toward the knight.

The knight dodged the attacks, and pulled out his sword, resigned.

*

At the same time, a large number of silhouettes appeared beside the stone pillars.

Their bodies were made of crystal.

They had all used to be villagers, but they had been turned into chunks of human-shaped crystal and stripped of their will. Perhaps it was easier to have them fight like this, since they were not trained for battle.

They rushed forward like a group of zombies.

"Ohohoho(*TN: Or something that sounds vaguely like that*), I don't need this place to be as crowded as a shopping center too!" Flat said, drawing a pattern in the air with his fingers.

Spikes of ice formed, and clasped onto the ankles of the horde. This was the best way to show off this teenager's skills other than intervention, and he puffed up his chest and winked.

"Enter... the El-Melloi classroom! What do you think, Le Chien-kun?"

“Don’t count me in as well!”

His classmate, Svin, said, as he gathered his Od. The Magical Energy solidified into an invisible wolf-shaped shell that enveloped his body.

He unleashed the energy from his throat, and used his magecraft-reinforced roar to knock down the remaining crystal people.

“They’re amazingly easy to deal with.”

“No.” Lord El-Melloi II shook his head. “It’s not over yet. Don’t let down your guard yet.”

A new wave of crystal warriors had appeared beside the stone pillars. This time, they were equipped with swords and shields, and looked completely different. They also had skulls for heads.

“The bone soldiers?”

Since the villagers had been recreated, there wasn’t any reason why the same couldn’t be done for the bone soldiers. The result of the battle had not been determined just yet.

-End of Part 2 of Chapter 5 of Book 7-

Chapter 5, Part 3:

At first glance, it looked like a draw.

Though Bersac and Illumia were faring slightly better, the rest of the enemies had all been defeated by Flat and Svin. Though they had taken some countermeasures, Flat was still more than equal to the task. With my mentor’s guidance, nothing seemed to be going wrong.

However.

After I chased off the spirit raven and distanced myself from Bersac, I heard the voice of Logos ReAct.

“...I don’t understand,” the woman said, as she began to transform into something else, becoming hazier and hazier until she became [something] that no longer resembled a person.

“Why am I here? Why can I not let this be? Why did I even release the independent elements inside me? Why can I not understand this? A reexamination. Yes, I need to reexamine this. The mind of King Arthur must be preserved according to the contract. For the purpose of reexamination, partial parameters will be returned to their original value,” said Logos ReAct, who was neither my mother, nor the Husk King. “Original parameters from TRI-HERMES, received. Confirmation from the director, received. Information on the scope and migrations of humanity, received. Preservation of the human order, confirmed. Testing possibilities in parallel universes with similar conditions... three seconds until the end of the test... two seconds... one second... complete.

“According to the results, I should continue. I should perform a test for all the possibilities in this limited environment. Yes, this closed-off microcosmos, is the doorway to the infinite macrocosmos.”

She answered her own question. Or, perhaps I should say, she spoke like someone calculating an equation.

“Yes. I must protect (this). I must arrive (there). I must save (it). I must prevent its destruction with all of my ability.”

...Save?

My mentor had said something similar when we were at the temple.

The Seven Superweapons of the Atlas Institute were created to save humanity from destruction. However, instead of saving humanity, the “power” within each would only end up bringing about the apocalypse again.

It was a paradox, where the goal contradicted the means. A fragment of a dream that resulted from being fixated on an unreachable goal.

...Perhaps my village was like that, too.

They wanted to resurrect the fallen King Arthur... They had started out respecting the king, and wanted to see her alive again. Resurrecting her was just the means they chose to use.

However, for the later generations, reviving the king became the goal itself. Though Grandmother had no idea why she wanted the King to be revived, she had made it the singular goal of her life.

Everyone was susceptible to making this kind of mistake. I was lost in this thought for a while before I snapped out of it when I felt the Magical Energy around me converge around the lance of Logos ReAct.

...It was...!

“I define this period of time that delayed my progress in saving humanity to be a bug. Requesting for calculations to become more efficient, and for permission to raise maximum energy output to eight percent. Permission received.”

With a whoosh, more Magical Energy coalesced onto the lance.

If she decided to release the true name of the dark Rhongomyniad, it would all be over. There was nothing we

could do about it. No one else knew the true power of that Noble Phantasm better than I did.

“Do you think you have time to look away, Gray?”

Bersac was approaching.

As he did, the spirit raven flew into the air and blocked my path. I had never seen this combination before. It was too nimble to dodge and too powerful to block. I didn’t have a single way to go up against this kind of attack.

However.

“Ahhhhh!”

I lunged forward, toward Bersac’s axe.

The rim of my hood was sliced apart. If I had been even slightly off, my carotid artery would have probably been torn. I stood up immediately, and rushed toward not Bersac, but Sister Illumia.

“Huh—?”

“Sir Kay!”

Before I even spoke, the experienced knight understood what I wanted to do.

He came around behind me and blocked Bersac’s axe, as I swung my scythe and deflected Illumia’s attack.

I had swapped places with the knight.

Since the knight wasn’t used to dealing with Illumia’s speed, I would use my scythe to force her back. That was what I planned on doing.

Perhaps because she had been so focused on the knight, Illumia hesitated for a second, and with that, my scythe

shattered her gauntlets.

Next to me, the knight (Sir Kay) parried Bersac's axe, and pushed me forward with his other hand.

"Go, Gray!"

"I understand!"

I strengthened myself to the limit of my capabilities and leaped upward. I had jumped more than ten meters into the air. I needed to get to Logos ReAct!

"Flat!"

"Yes(*TN: Originally in English*), Professor!"

Behind me, the teenager drew a pattern in the air.

For a moment, Logos React froze. He was powerful enough to interfere with even the Atlas Institute's technology. I gave all I had at that moment, and swung my scythe as hard as I could.

There was a clang of hard objects hitting each other. The nearly-complete scythe had deflected my scythe.

"...It cannot be deciphered. I thought so," Logos ReAct moaned. The act of simply raising her lance against Flat's restraints had made her completely lose her balance. In my eyes, she was covered in weak points.

"Why can I not ignore you? I serve only my own goals, and yet, why have I chased you to this point?"

There wasn't a trace of emotion in her words.

Though it seemed like a question, did she really find it surprising?

Either way, I still told her what I thought.

“That’s because the Husk King’s inside you.”

Even now, her being was the same as mine. One of the three essential elements of a person.

Since that was the case, I was probably a defective creation. I had been made for the resurrection of King Arthur, but I had not managed to fulfill my purpose. In the end, I had managed to escape thanks to my mother’s sacrifice, and now, I was foolishly trying to stop the root of this issue, Logos ReAct. I didn’t want to escape anymore.

I still had not fully wrapped my head around the matter of my mother.

However, I still wanted to face it as best as I could.

“Why are you standing in my way?”

“I’m sorry.”

I strengthened my arms with all my might. There was plenty of Magical Energy in the environment. The air was full of the Mana from the lance. Therefore, I continued to cycle the energy, until my Magic Circuits began to burn from the strain.

“You didn’t do anything wrong. You were just acting based on the Contract of Atlas, which told you to imitate the mind of King Arthur to the best of your ability, but you ended up malfunctioning as a result. We only care about ourselves... sometimes we give you commands, other times, we try to stop you... and now, we’re preparing to destroy you.”

I didn’t know why, but I felt my eyes moisten.

What stood in front of me was neither the mind of King Arthur, my mother, nor the real Logos ReAct. She was an amalgam of the three.

However, at the same time, I felt that she was also myself.

I recalled how it felt, being transformed into the body of King Arthur, becoming the vessel of their worship, and never even thinking to resist.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. But I can’t back down.”

My scythe slowly moved toward my opponent. The reconstructed Sister Illumia and Bersac should have come to stop me, but it seemed like my mentor and the knight had managed to stop them. There was no one to interfere with the fight between Logos ReAct and I.

“What is this? Is it Rhongomyniad? No, the structure is different. What is this?” Logos ReAct asked, staring at my scythe.

“To you, it’s probably the Holy Lance, Rhongomyniad,” I said.

The lance reciprocated my effort.

Though it did not speak or mock me, it still helped me, as usual.

“But, to me, it’s different,” I shouted, ignoring the pain that tore through my body as if my nerves were being torn from me. “To me, this is Add!”

I clenched the scythe even tighter. I poured out all my thoughts to this fickle thing that did not answer me anymore.

“It’s my, friend!”

“.....”

For a moment, Logos ReAct was speechless.

“...Why am I here... I don’t understand... this is illogical... cannot comprehend... cannot reach a judgment... the theory is contradictory... the calculations cannot be made complete...”

As she muttered those words, she became weaker and weaker.

“What is, death?”

Perhaps that was the last question she ever asked.

She gave up all of her resistance.

The blade of my scythe cleaved through the woman’s body.

As I felt the sensation of cutting through flesh and bone, I reached out with one hand and caught the dagger that my mentor had thrown at me.

Erosion.

Without a thought in my mind, I slashed downward with that hand, and the shining golden dagger pierced through the body of Logos ReAct.

-End of Part 3 of Chapter 5 of Book 7-

Chapter 5, Part 4:

The dagger pierced straight into the area around her clavicle.

“Wait, is this—”

Would Logos ReAct be stopped this easily?

Could the deaths of my mother and Father Fernando be overturned?

The woman did not scream in response to being stabbed. There was no blood either, she simply stopped moving, like a puppet whose strings had been cut. If Erosion had worked properly, had the Husk King's mind been separated from her body?

Just as I wanted to reach out to catch the falling body, I froze.

"[I understand now.]"

The body suddenly stopped falling, and turned toward me.

"Ah, is this why I was so obsessed? Is this death? Is this a graveyard? ...Is that so. That is why I was so obsessed with you. I was correct."

Though her face was still hazy, I got the distinct impression that she was staring straight at me. The corners of her mouth curled upwards in a smile.

"You are, my death."

As soon as the words left her mouth, something changed.

"What—?"

With a swish, the woman's body shattered in front of my eyes.

She had turned into sand.

Red sand.

In the space of a second, the body of Logos React had become a pile of abnormally bright red sand.

It wasn't just the woman. Even Sister Illumia, Bersac, and the bone soldiers who were a certain distance away became sand, too, and increased in volume so that it nearly covers the entire graveyard.

“This is...it can’t be... Is it the transformative ability of the Philosopher’s Stone...?(*TN: great, there’s more magecraft nonsense! I don’t understand a word of it!*)”my mentor moaned. “Fuck, so that’s what kind of weapon Logos ReAct is!”

“What do you mean?”

“The Philosopher’s Stone was originally one of the creations of the Atlas Institute! It’s the ultimate place for storage, a book(*TN: What?! A book?!*) that can contain almost infinite amounts of information! Logos ReAct itself was created using the Philosopher’s Stone, under a certain specific state... As long as it continues to store records, it will continue to multiply itself forever...! Ah, that’s why all the people disappeared! They were dragged in when Logos ReAct tried to understand its death for the first time! So that’s what being made to save the world yet being able to destroy it means!”

It was a desert of red, stretching out infinitely, blanketing the world in red sand.

“Logos ReAct realized her own abilities for the first time. This hypothetical world that she created will become buried in this soon. If we were exposed to her for a long time, we might even be broken down into this sea of information. If that happens, then...”

Would reality be next?

This was probably what Zepia was trying to stop.

In order to prevent the entire world from turning into red sand, he had stayed in this village. That wasn’t out of the goodness of his heart, or because of something simple, like a sense of justice or a love of humanity.

He did this simply because he had decided to do so.

He was a person who existed for this reason, as a prop-like human. A human-like prop.

Then, suddenly, from the place where Logos ReAct had disappeared, a giant shadow rose to the air. It was no longer in the shape of a person. The figure that had been constructed from the sand spread its majestic wings and stared down at us as we stood there, pathetically on the crimson earth.

Ah, that was...

A bird.

“The bird of Hermes...” My mentor said, looking up.

I recalled that that was the name of the god who protected travelers and merchants in Greek mythology.

“Hermes, from Greek mythology, ended up fusing together with the Egyptian god Thoth and the alchemist Mercurius(*TN: This might be referring to Hermes Trismegistus?*). Sometimes he appears as a person, and other times as a bird. Ah, this is quite fitting, as Hermes was also responsible for guiding the souls of the dead to the underworld.”

A divine bird that was meant to save humanity, but destroyed it instead.

[You are, my death.]

The words were not spoken. Instead, the information had been given directly to my brain.

Just like the first time I had met the Husk King, it had become something that could not speak.

[That is why I have come this far to kill you. It was the right thing to do in order to prevent death. I shall define this as correct.]

It spread its massive wings once more.

I immediately yelled in warning when I sensed the staggering amount of Magical Energy that had gathered on those feathers.

“Sir!”

With a screech, a volley of scarlet feathers rained down on us. It was almost like we were being bombed. The Magical Energy contained in each feather triggered a violent reaction many times more powerful than gunpowder.

The sand-covered ground was littered with chunks of rock, as every single one of the pillars had been reduced to rubble. Apart from me, everyone else had been blown away. In the face of the overwhelming power of the feathers of sand, the incomplete Bounded Field was about as effective as a sheet of paper.

As if pitying us for not being able to withstand even the simplest of its attacks, the diving bird circled in the sky above our heads.

...Ah.

I could not speak.

It wasn't just a physical problem. The force of the Magical Energy unleashed by those feathers had completely messed up my insides, and I felt as if my intestines had been crushed by someone. Even if I tried to strengthen myself enough to stand up, I wouldn't be able to do anything else.

The divine bird in the sky had started to gather Magical Energy again. If that attack happened again, it would be impossible for us to survive.

“...Ah...” I never thought that a single strike was enough to stop me from even standing up. In terms of power, it was already comparable to Faker’s Hecatic Wheel. If I took the range of the attack into account, it would be more powerful. However, since this was one of the Seven Superweapons, this attack was probably only the tip of the iceberg of the divine bird’s abilities. The bird continued to circle in the sky, as if to say that in its eyes, there was no difference between normal humans, mages, and even Heroic Spirits.

Where was my mentor...?

I was still curled up on the ground, and I could only move my eyes.

It seemed that Svin had managed to protect him in the nick of time.

Bestial Magecraft was best used for defense. However, even though they had only felt the shockwaves, they could not get up to their feet immediately.

I could not, either. Even though I had strengthened myself and used my scythe for defense at the same time, that bombardment was too powerful.

...Stand up, I thought desperately.

Don’t fall for something this insignificant. It was just a couple of broken bones. Now was not the time to cower.

No matter how much I tried to encourage and scold myself, I only managed to move my eyes and my lungs. I had been damaged badly, both physically, and magically. I could not

overcome it with my will alone, and anxiety continued to circle through my mind.

Stand up, stand up... Stand up!

Why couldn't I stand up? How could I fall here, before the mystery of my hometown was solved?

“Wake up.”

Someone grabbed my hood. His hand and his voice pulled me back into consciousness.

“Wake up, Gray!”

“...!” As I was being carried by him, my confused brain managed to recognize who the voice belonged to. “Sir Kay...”

“Didn't that thing say you were its death?”

It seemed that the knight had also heard its thoughts. His armor had been completely wrecked by the attack. No, he had been hurt even more severely than I had. His chestplate had been pierced, and the rest of his armor was barely holding together. If he had been a regular person, I would have not believed that he was still breathing. Even so, the knight still stood there, determined.

“Since it said that, forget about whatever nonsensical fairy tale about saving humanity or destroying it. There's nothing between you two now but the fight for survival.”

The knight's words were pounding on my eardrums.

“I...”

I realized then that I had not released my grip on my scythe. This told me that it wasn't just my heart that hadn't given up, but my body as well.

“Exactly. Make sure you don’t lose it,” the knight said, satisfied.

However, I still couldn’t do it.

It was simply too late. That blow was too powerful, for my mentor, Flat, Svin, and I. Though I had regained my will, the Reaper was still barreling towards us as we were helpless.

The divine bird(Hermes) flew towards us.

*

Feathers of sand full of Magical Energy shot from the wings of the divine bird(Hermes).

We had already witnessed its power, enough to destroy a fortress along with the army inside it, comparable to that of an anti-fortress Noble Phantasm.

However this time, the bombardment had deviated drastically.

“Huh?”

I looked blankly at the destruction some distance away from me. The large craters that had been created on the desert showed that its power had not diminished in the slightest. The divine bird also started wobbling as it flew in the sky, and spread its wings so that it wouldn’t fall.

My eyes widened. At the same time, a lively voice came from behind me.

“Bingo, bingo, bingo! It’s not everyday I get a chance to say this, so let me do Trimmau’s job for her! Come on, Hermes! Throw away your chickenshit wings(*TN: I can’t tell what this means or what movie this is supposed to come from*)! ...I’m joking, of course, but I almost found a weakness when Gray stabbed that Mystic Code into it!” Flat said as he lay face down on the ground, barely managing to hold his hand up.

Beside his hand, there was a crystal ball. It was probably one of the countless crystal balls that had been floating in the space where they had met with Zepia.

“I grabbed one of these before we got here. Mr. Zepia probably noticed it, but that doesn’t matter,” Svin said, somewhat embarrassed.

That meant that was a Mystic Code of the Atlas Institute that could be connected to Logos React. Though it wasn’t easy, did it mean that Flat, who excelled in intervention, could use it to hack into Logos ReAct?

“But, Svin...”

“This is nothing,” Svin said, wiping the blood on his chin. He should have been hurt the most out of the three, as he was the one who protected them. However, he looked even more noble when he was covered in blood. At the same time, Flat’s attitude towards Svin was extremely natural. He didn’t thank the other teenager, nor did he show embarrassment. The two, who were usually constantly bickering, now seemed like two parts of the same being.

“But I haven’t done anything yet.”

“Exactly! Since we’ve said that we won’t lose ever again, not even to a Grand Puppeteer, if we retreat like this, we’ll be too ashamed of ourselves to return to the El-Melloi classroom!” Flat said, with a smile.

It was an innocent yet fearless smile. Perhaps that was the nature of a mage.

In that period of time, the image that had been reflected in the crystal ball kept on changing. Many symbols and numbers appeared, and Flat looked at them, intrigued, as he kept tapping rhythmically with his fingers. It was similar to what he had done before, but not quite the same. He

looked as if he was playing a piano, or some similar instrument.

“How is it, Flat?” My mentor asked.

“I just need to fix the malfunctioning parts of Logos React, right? Gotcha! I’ll start looking for it now so that the data about Gray’s mother can be...” He was in the middle of his sentence when his expression suddenly changed. “...W- what’s this...?”

“Flat?” My mentor said with a frown.

Flat seemed to not take notice of this.

“...The calculation speed is already less than a tenth of what it used to be... and only a small part of its functions are being used to counter my hacking... but it’s still [much faster than I am!]”

This was probably the first time I had heard something like this from the teenager who always seemed happy and relaxed.

“Give half of the work to me!”

Flat activated his Bestial Magecraft and put one hand on Flat’s back. This was probably the same thing my mentor had done with Luvia before, a connection of Magic Circuits. By multiplying the two circuits, the speed of the calculations increased.

However, even so, they could not contend against Logos React. Could not even the two best students of the El-Melloi classroom get even close to the ability of one of the Seven Superweapons of the Atlas Institute?

Flat’s situation stabilized for about ten seconds, but the same went for the divine bird, too. It regained control and

began to leisurely fly towards us again. If it tried attacking us again, would Flat still be able to make it miss us? No, it probably wouldn't be possible.

"Should I say that this is only what someone could expect from one of the Seven Superweapons?" My mentor said, as if he had predicted this outcome. "Since we won't be able to increase the speed of our calculations, we can only try and slow it down."

"Then..."

"Then our only choice is to stab it again with Erosion."

My mentor looked toward the object that I was holding in my arms.

I had managed to retrieve this dagger.

"Erosion didn't pierce through its body entirely. That's why it ended up becoming stubborn to the point of calling you its death. After they came here, the Husk King and Logos ReAct became even more closely bonded together."

For some reason, I had the same understanding.

The Husk King had not been separated from Logos ReAct yet. Or rather, I had felt that something had protected against the separation the moment before it was going to happen. Logos ReAct believed that in order for it to understand the concept of death, it needed the Husk King... or something like that.

If that was the case,

"...We'll need to use Erosion to separate them completely."

Would that be enough to resolve the situation?

“But how do we do that? The divine bird(Hermes) is flying around, and we can’t get up there.”

“I see, so we’ll just need to stop it from flying,” the knight said, partially to himself after hearing my words. He nodded, and then turned around. “I’ll take care of it.”

“Sir Kay?”

“Though we’ve only known each other for half a day, we’ve had a good time together, haven’t we, Lord El-Melloi II?”

The knight looked up at the sky.

The divine bird(Hermes) spread its wings for the third time.

“Ah, it really doesn’t know when to stop, does it?”

Why didn’t I step up to try and stop the hazy knight from advancing toward the divine bird?

“Sir Kay...”

“No matter where I am, what I do doesn’t make a difference. That’s why I never even managed to reach the Hill of Camlann.”

The Hill of Camlann. In my memory, that was the place where King Arthur had met her end.

Though he was a knight of the Round Table, he had not participated in the battle at all. He had died before he could.

“Are you...”

A loud voice inside my head yelled at me to stop him. However, even without that voice, it already took all of my strength to stay upright. The others were not capable of moving around freely, either. So the only reason why the knight still acted like it was nothing was simply because he lacked a material form.

“You know, Gray, I’ve always thought that if you were even the tiniest bit more hesitant, I could have just slacked off and gotten away with it. I never thought that you’d be so defiant. It goes for this time as well. You said a lot of stuff that made it sound like you were giving up, but you didn’t end up sinking into a whirlpool of pointless self-abuse. You’re actually pretty good at this.”

That was definitely not my strong point.

If it was the me of the past, I would have easily given up. However, the many cases and people that I had seen had changed me a little bit. However...

“It must feel good, being alive and able to change like that,” the knight said. “Don’t leave your heart with the dead(*TN: Alternatively, don’t care too much about the dead*). What you see now is only a shadow. No matter if you’re looking at a hero who’s achieved all sorts of great things, or a remnant of the past like me, we’re all just dead people. The living shouldn’t be held down by our existence.”

At this, he said something else with a somewhat annoyed tone of voice.

“...Though I say that, no child would hate a fairy tale with a hero in it, would they? It could be used to give you dreams, like cheap wine. Haha, it might not even be that bad to live like your mentor.”

A new wave of red sand was about to be sent toward us from the wings of the divine bird. The knight stood in front of us, blocking its way.

“—Begin simulation(*TN: Actually it’s the same word used in Mash’s Noble Phantasm! So I guess it could also be ‘pseudo-deployment’?*).”

He raised his right hand. Though his movements were light, I could feel a dense concentration of Magical Energy there.

“Noble Phantasm, set. Ah, I’ll ignore the precise parameters. I’m not even a Heroic Spirit, just someone imitating Galahad.”

It was the knight(Sir Kay)’s Noble Phantasm.

He drew a circle with his fingers, and a strange white mist appeared in the middle of the desert of red sand.

Perhaps it was a Noble Phantasm that was meant to originate from water. However, it was only a simulation. It wasn’t possible for someone like Sir Kay, who wasn’t a Servant, to create even the hypothetical construct of a Noble Phantasm. Servants were simply too special.

If he wanted to force himself to do so, not only would he not succeed, he would also die.

“Sir Kay...!”

“Don’t worry about me.”

For the first time.

For the first time, only for a moment, I saw his face. That was probably because of the large concentration of Magical Energy that he had gathered for the simulation of a Noble Phantasm.

It was a face that looked slightly troubled, yet carried a smile that looked like it belonged to someone with a terrible personality.

That probably wasn’t what the knight was supposed to look like. Just like what he said about how the Husk King wasn’t the true King Arthur, that appearance was a mixture of Add and his original face.

Even so, or perhaps, because of that very reason, to me, it was...

“Trust me, it’ll be fine, Idiot Gray.”

Feathers of sand shot from the wings of the divine bird. The knight, who had been looking at me, turned to face the bombardment and shouted.

“Deploying Pseudo Noble Phantasm— Camelot Image(the Ephemeral Yet Unforgettable Castle)!(*TN: Absolutely butchering the rest of that name, but oh well. It's ドラゴン城 , in case anyone wanted to know*)”

Was that the fortress itself?

A Camelot made of mist rose up around the knight. It was that beautiful castle of chalk, praised by bards and poets from ancient times to the present. That castle, where it was said that as long as the famous Knights of the Round Table were gathered, no invaders or monsters would ever be able to enter.

Ah, I had thought that not even a hypothetical construct could be created. That even if he had managed to unleash it, by some miracle, it would only cause his death.

Just then, the knight had proved that it was possible.

However.

As if trying to say that even miracles like this were fakes, the feathers of the divine bird(Hermes) still fell upon us.

It was as if it was a castle made of glass.

For a few seconds, the walls blocked the attack, but they were quickly shattered.

“Damn it! But it was nice to see. I’ve already grown sick of looking at that beautiful castle!”

The bombardment enveloped the knight and his laughter.

His figure disappeared in the flurry of dust.

The divine bird(Hermes) chirped loudly, as if it was celebrating its own victory.

However, something else appeared from the dust, just as it prepared to spread its wings for another attack. (*TN: Yeah these are all one-sentence paragraphs*)

Something struck the divine bird(Hermes) with an incredible amount of force.

It was one of the bird’s own feathers of sand.

“—!”

I raised my hand to block the shockwave of the explosion, and understood what had happened.

The castle of mist did not protect the knight’s body at all. That had never been the plan. The castle that he said he had long since grown tired of looking at did not have the ability to do that. However, it absorbed some of the divine bird(Hermes)’s feathers and shot them back at it, like a trick shot.

Of course, the attack from the divine bird(Hermes) was effective. The superweapon was now falling from the sky, being dragged by gravity toward the earth.

...It was as if that weak knight, who had never properly won a battle, had never lost to anything, whether it was another knight, or a monster.

As if that was the embodiment of his life.

“Sir Kay!”

There was no response.

The sharp-tongued knight disappeared without a trace, as if he had been an error from the very beginning. I should have expected that. Even if he hadn't taken the full force of the attack, imitating a Noble Phantasm as a non-Servant was enough to destroy his Spirit Origin(*TN: Alternatively, Saint Graph*).

I recalled what he said when I used Rhongomyniad and undid the Seal of Thirteen.

—“This is a battle to live.”

It was the first voice that gave its approval.

Perhaps that was why he had commented on me, because I wanted to live. I desperately resisted the urge to collapse to the ground. If I did now, everything the knight did for us would go to waste.

“Sir... Kay...”

No matter how I called for him, he would not respond.

However, in his place—

“...Ihihihihi. I think I've slept quite enough.” A strange, piercing noise came from my scythe. Why did I feel so overjoyed to hear this voice again, after parting with it for less than a day?

“...Add...?”

“Ihihihihi! I've finally woken up! I know everything that happened because I share that guy's memory, but you've really gotten yourself into trouble!”

Like usual, the eyes on the scythe opened, and it spoke to me with a voice full of emotion.

What should I do? I felt tears in my eyes.

I felt as if I only ever knew how to cry. I was too weak to be of any use, but now, I knew that I needed to fight, no matter what.

“Add...!”

“Owowowowow! You idiot! Can’t you be a bit gentler? Don’t forget that when I wake up, your strengthening also gets stronger!”

Yes.

The Magical Energy I used for strengthening was split between myself and Add. That was the natural result, with Add joining the battle in a place so rich in Mana. More Magical Energy than I had ever felt before was now circulating within my body.

“Please lend me your power, Add.”

“Ah! There’s really not talking you out of it. I’ll only lend you a little, don’t cry too much about it!”

“Of course not!”

I held back my emotions though I was at my breaking point, and took off from the ground.

*

Lord El-Melloii II watched the knight’s Pseudo Noble Phantasm deflect the divine bird(Hermes)’s attack, and watched it fall to the ground.

“...Ah.”

Sure enough, he thought.

That figure that said to “hand it to me” filled him with a sense of nostalgia. Those were the words of someone who was prepared to never return again. That was how the king who had changed the course of his life had rode forward with his scarlet cape fluttering behind him.

He felt a twinge of envy.

“‘Don’t leave your heart with the dead’, he said.”

He smiled a wry smile.

Could there be any words more biting to him than those?

Though that person had followed up by saying that he didn’t hate fairy tales, he must have been hated at the Round Table for having such a foul mouth.

Perhaps he had also been indispensable for that reason.

“Sir, can you give us some instructions?”

“Oh, of course,” Lord El-Melloi II said with a nod.

The divine bird(Hermes) that had soared in the sky not long ago was now tilting dangerously to one side. As a result, the speed of its calculations had also greatly decreased. Though it had not slowed down decisively yet, there was still a mountain of preparations that needed to be done.

“Flat, I’ll send my plan of the spell over to you now. This will probably be more effective against Logos ReAct.”

He poured in some Magical Energy along with the pattern.

After receiving the thought, Flat blinked twice.

“Wait, Professor, isn’t this what Dr. Heartless wrote on the evidence board...?”

“Yes. I am able to analyze it on a theoretical level. This is enough for you to work with, yes?”

“Of course, Professor! Just leave it to me! This is like giving a demon a golden rod(*TN: this is an idiom, that's the literal definition. It means making something strong even stronger*), giving stars to Mario, or giving a Karate master a boomerang!”

The knight of the Round Table was no longer there.

They would not be able to withstand another attack from the divine bird(Hermes). If they were hit again by the feathers, he could be sure that not a single person would survive. Even so, no one felt afraid.

*

Flat Escardos was sometimes called the child cursed with blessings(*TN: Alternatively, the blessed cursed child? The cursed blessed child?*).

The Escardos family was one of the few truly ancient families in the Clock Tower. Usually, even a long-lived Magic Crest would rot over a long period of time. Because of this, none of his ancestors had been remarkable mages. That made the Escardos family one of the few exceptions to the rule that older things carried stronger mystery.

However, if you asked if the birth of the prodigy named Flat had been a welcome surprise, the answer would be no.

At first, they had been glad.

They had reveled in the joy of finally producing something exceptional, as a family that had been mocked for a lineage of mediocrity.

However, the excessive excellence of this child made it impossible for them to feel happy for long.

Perhaps you could say that he was too exceptional.

Actually, he had almost [died at the hands of his own parents.]

That was why they called him the child who was cursed with blessings. Though he had been gifted with a gift that almost every mage coveted, he was also hated.

Huh, why would I be thinking of that now? He thought, as he built the spell according to the plan that he had just received from Lord El-Melloi II.

He always thought that he couldn't unleash his full potential for fear that everyone around him would suffer because of it. Why did he need to try when he could slack off? It was easy to fake a smile by using Magical Energy to shift his facial muscles. There was hardly anyone who could see through this disguise.

However, this was only the case before he met his professor and Svin.

—“Sir, this guy smells like an absolute mess! Can I get rid of him?”

—“What!? Are you really going to let someone like him become my underclassman? With a smell as annoying as that, he'll definitely just be a bother! Won't it be better to bite him into pieces before he gets the chance to?”

What was he meant to do? That was his deepest secret.

What his professor had said affected him in a way that went without saying, but hearing Svin comment on him like that made him so excited he felt his hairs stand up on end.

...Of course. It was no wonder.

He licked his lips.

What he did here and now was simply a confirmation of something in the past. He was no longer afraid anymore, not only of his talent, or what motivated him, but also of what committing further would bring.

That was because.

“Alright, just wait and see!”

He looked toward the divine bird(Hermes).

Because there, lay the much-awaited challenge where he could go all out— [where going all out might not even be enough]—!

-End of Part 4 of Chapter 5 of Book 7-

Chapter 5, Part 5:

“Of course not!”

I nodded, and took off from the ground. In a single step, I reached the place where the knight(Sir Kay) had disappeared. I did not turn my head to look back. I didn’t have the time to do that. I could not waste the instant that he had given me. I leaped forward before the divine bird(Hermes) could fly into the sky again, and shouted.

“Add! Release first stage restrictions!”

“Ihihihihi! It’s the first time you’ve used that thing, isn’t it? Can you make it?”

The scythe transformed back into a box for a split second before spinning like a Rubik’s cube, and changing into a giant wing-shaped boomerang.

However, I didn’t plan on using it as a boomerang, but as a hang glider(*TN: A metal hang glider? Is it just me or does*

that sound like a bad idea). Though I wouldn't be able to glide over a long distance, as long as I had a sufficient running start, I should be able to glide for a little bit. Though I had never used it in this form before, I glided through the air as if I was being instructed by someone.

I jumped toward the back of the divine bird(Hermes), and began to run after doing a few rolls. The divine bird(Hermes) reacted to that, and the red sand on its back turned into spikes and shot toward me.

“Add!”

It changed back into a scythe so I could block the attacks.

I was very sure of my target.

That was only natural, since Logos React still contained the mind of King Arthur.

I could clearly see a point on its back.

I swung my lance, cutting apart another wave of the sand spikes, and jumped up with the nimbleness of a clown walking a tightrope.

As I was in the air, I threw out the dagger with all my might.

Of course, it only managed to pierce through its feathers. Erosion wasn't much sharper than any regular dagger, so it was impossible for it to pierce through the divine bird's heart. Spikes of sand continued to appear.

However.

“Release first stage restrictions: Battering Ram!”

The scythe changed into the shape of a battering ram. It was supposed to be a siege weapon used by multiple people to break open the walls of a fortress, comparable to a

Servant with a level D Mana Burst skill. It was the most powerful weapon that Add could become. I let all of my remaining Magical Energy flow into it, and crushed all the incoming spikes of sand.

“Aaahhhhhhh!”

I swung the battering ram downward forcefully, and into the golden dagger.

*

The divine bird (Hermes) faltered dramatically.

It finally fell to the ground, and I was tossed into the air.

I tried my best to protect myself, but luckily, I was going in the direction of my mentor, Flat, and Svin. Perhaps the divine bird had been trying to use me to attack them.

Regardless, my mentor looked towards the divine bird and gave an instruction.

“Now, Flat!” He shouted.

Immediately, the teenager began to recite a spell.

“Game Select! Circuit: Full Connect!”

Light poured forth from Flat’s hands.

Through my Magic Circuits, I could tell that the light was made from many complicated numbers and symbols.

No, the light didn’t come from only Flat. It actually came from Svin, who provided large amounts of Magical Energy as he stood there with one hand on Flat’s shoulder. Flat skillfully manipulated the light, with the support of Svin’s sense of smell and the supplementary Od.

The light extended toward the crystal ball, and perhaps because of the spell that my mentor gave them, it became a

chain of mystery.

The alchemist's bird made of red sand was captured by those chains.

However, the divine bird had no intention of taking the attack, from the surprised look that suddenly appeared on the teenagers' faces, I could tell that another kind of power was flowing through the chains toward them.

That was the only part of it that I could understand.

The scales of victory were still quivering between the two sides. The invisible clash mesmerized me, and I lost track of time(*TN: I'm pretty sure that's not what it's supposed to mean*).

“Who will win...” I said, trying to keep my exhausted body upright and gazing at the struggle, at a loss of what to do.

Suddenly, a familiar smell reached my nose.

My mentor had begun to smoke a cigar.

He had probably taken it out as I was concentrating on what was happening over on the other side.

“Is there still a need to ask? The result of the battle has been decided a long time ago. If we didn’t know what our opponents were capable of, then perhaps it might be different, but we’ve already determined that.”

I listened to my mentor’s words with a sense of wonder.

His eyes squinted slightly, as if with envy.

Or perhaps jealousy.

Or maybe like he was gazing at a faraway star.

“—How would my students lose?” My mentor said, not because he trusted them too much, or because that statement was forced, but because it was something obvious.

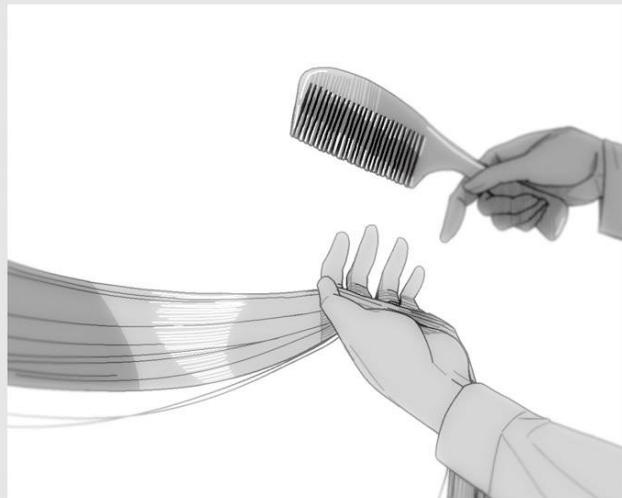
—And then.

The result was just as he had said.

-End of Part 5 of Chapter 5 of Book 7-

Epilogue:

◆ 終章 ◆



“—Is it really alright if you don't visit your mother?”

The person who asked me the question was Zepia, who stood in the shade of a tree to be out of the sunlight. We were all outside the village, at the foot of the mountain.

It was now sometime in the evening, and the sun had mostly sunk into the horizon. Even so, it seemed that sunlight was still troublesome for the director of the Atlas Institute. Apart from his usual cape, he had also donned a hood.

“...My mother’s alright, right?”

“Yes. Though she and Father Fernando were in a critical condition, after administering some first aid, Sister Illumia took them to a hospital nearby with connections to the Holy Church. Their lives shouldn’t be in danger. The Church doesn’t know anything about how she took your place, and her link with the Husk King has also been completely severed. You don’t have to worry about whether or not she will become some sort of magecraft specimen. ...In terms of what else happened, nobody in the village died.”

It almost felt like a joke, like mountains had parted only to reveal a single mouse(*TN: Also an idiom, means something that sounds substantial but really isn’t*). After such a comically large amount of turmoil, I found it difficult to believe that it would end in such a peaceful way.

Or perhaps it would be more fitting to say that we had made it into a peaceful ending.

I rubbed my shivering shoulders. The frigid wind was a little harder to bear, as we had just been in the summer of the Second Cycle not long ago.

“I suppose you could say that the mind of King Arthur—the Husk King is an exception. In actuality, she was only returned to the inside of Logos ReAct as a mental model. The concept of time is vague for a being that does not have a body or a soul, so the months that she spent underground was equivalent to a couple of minutes of napping.”

Around half a day had passed since the battle. After we had been released from that space, we had listened to Zepia's explanations as he finished what he called 'dealing with the aftermath'.

According to him, the contract that meant that the Atlas Institute had to lend out Logos ReAct until King Arthur was revived or ruled as incapable of being revived was still in place. The main reason why this case happened, Logos React, which had fused with my mother and the mind of King Arthur, seemed to have entered a state of self-diagnosis and self-repair. It would probably remain that way for the next couple of years, and considering the intervals between the Fuyuki Holy Grail Wars, there should be no need to worry about it for the time being.

Of course, the old woman who believed in King Arthur the most fervently wouldn't give up, but you could say that it didn't matter either way. The only reason why she had gone as far as to fight openly with the Holy Church was because a chance to reunite the body, mind, and soul had appeared. After this was no longer the case, she wouldn't be able to do anything.

"Does my mother know that I'm still alive?"

"That information should have been transmitted to her, because she was briefly fused with Logos ReAct. Though most humans aren't capable of processing that many pieces of information, theoretically, she will be left with the impression that you are alive."

"That's all I need to know. As long as she knows I'm still alive."

If I went to visit her and the rest of the villagers happened to find out, there would be trouble. If that did happen, I

didn't know what the desperate woman and the other believers would do.

"What about going to visit her in disguise?" Flat suggested, as if he had sensed what I was thinking about.

Speaking of that, the spell that he had cast on my button had still been in place, so it was a shock when we returned here to find that my face was different. Our bodies in the Second Cycle seemed to have been constructed by Logos ReAct, so we didn't have even a scratch on us.

"No, there's no need to. Besides, my mother and I still need some time away from each other."

I'll definitely meet her again one day, I thought. One day, but now. Before that happened, I first needed to get my own thoughts in order.

What did all the things she had done for me mean, and what did she think about them? In order to not make any more mistakes, I wanted to answer each one of my questions, and I didn't know how long that would take.

Before that, though, it must have been disorienting for a lot of the villagers for summer to suddenly become winter as they were preparing to revive King Arthur. I didn't know what would happen to the village in the future, but it would be impossible for it to maintain the status quo. From that perspective, having my mother stay in a hospital with connections to the Holy Church seemed safer to me.

Just as I considered this, my mentor spoke.

"...The Chivalric Orders haven't taken any action yet, so it seems that the Holy Church hasn't noticed the situation over here."

“Huh? Isn’t that strange? Since all the people in this village have disappeared for half a year, that means that Sister Illumia and Father Fernando haven’t contacted them for that long as well, right? They were sent there to monitor the village, so wouldn’t it seem weird if they didn’t send any reports for that long?” Svin asked, pointing out the problem.

That was true. Since this place was already under surveillance, the central members of the Holy Church should have done something. What would be a reason for them not to...?

“Did someone mess with the information?”

“Heartless, isn’t it?”

“Who knows?” Zepia said, deflecting the question.

My mentor shifted his gaze to his students.

“Flat, Svin, can you scout out the town at the foot of the mountain? I don’t think anything will come up, but it would be a problem if members of the Holy Church really came.”

“Gotcha!”

“We will try to return as soon as possible!”

Flat and Svin gave a quick salute before turning around quickly.

They had started out walking peacefully on the road, but somewhere along the way, something happened between them that caused them to start arguing, which gradually turned into something that resembled a game of tag that involved magecraft. It was very much in their style. Though they hadn’t sustained any injuries, they were probably still tired. So, seeing them acting so livelily, should I say that

that was what could only be expected from the twin juggernauts of the El-Melloi Classroom?

My mentor watched them go before turning to Zepia again.

“Oh, and, something else that caught my attention. Do you mind telling me something before we leave?”

“What?”

“I feel like the order is wrong.”

“The order?”

“Those four rules are connected to the Magic Circuits of the grave keepers. In other words, it’s reasonable to assume that that was passed down the Blackmore line for generations, from long before the Common Era.”

“Yes, that is a reasonable assumption,” Zepia said, nodding. Above him, a raven cawed. The call sounded somewhat lonely, as it resounded throughout the silent forest.

Bersac had probably returned to reality as well. No matter what happened to the village in the future, I don’t think that the grave keeper who taught me all sorts of knowledge and skills would leave this place. Perhaps he would live out the entire rest of his life as the grave keeper of Blackmore Graveyard.

“However, that Black Madonna is possibly modeled after Morgan Le Fay, so it’s relic of King Arthur’s time, after the Common Era. Most people agree that she comes from around the Fifth Century. So why would a rule about the Black Madonna appear in the grave keeper’s rules?”

“Those two don’t necessarily contradict each other. The last rule was just added on afterwards. The grave keepers of Blackmore Graveyard were originally just skilled Soul Carriers.”

“True, Magic Crests are meant to be added onto by later generations. ...But, those four rules were added on far more recently than we assumed, right? For instance, maybe they could have been added a few centuries ago, around the same time when you became the director of the Atlas Institute.”

Hearing my mentor’s words, Zepia’s eyebrow twitched slightly.

“Just say what you’re trying to imply directly.”

“I think the order is the opposite of what I just said. Actually, out of the four rules, the one about the Black Madonna was the one that had always been there, to more efficiently discover someone with the potential to become King Arthur. That’s what the statue functions as, as a Mystic Code. None of the other rules are necessary. Yes, though they stop the villagers from accidentally getting too close to Mystery, and because hiding the Bounded Field around the swamp would be quite difficult. However, those rules only tell people [what not to do]. Perhaps it might even be for the frequently visiting director of the Atlas Institute to [be able to calculate the parameters of the villagers more easily.]”

My eyes widened.

“You have lent out Logos ReAct to this land, and before the Contract of Atlas is fulfilled or deemed incapable of being fulfilled, you cannot retrieve it. Of course, you must have set up some kind of Mystic Code used for monitoring this place, but if you were to intervene directly, that would violate the contract. We’ve already proven that with this case. Just like the Magic Circuits, the four rules only affect the grave keepers. You set those rules with the grave keeper back then, getting as close to violating the contract as you could without actually violating it.”

After he listened to what my mentor had to say, the alchemist shrugged. He didn't deny it, though, and under these circumstances, that was as the best confirmation we could get.

My mentor sighed deeply.

"You really are patient and well-prepared."

"The alchemists of the Atlas Institute are still mages, which means you can never trust one completely. You should know that."

The alchemist spoke with a hint of a smile as he looked at my mentor, who remained serious.

"....."

I listened to their conversation, speechless.

In this case alone, my impression of Zepia had been completely overturned three times already. How was I meant to understand someone like him? I first thought that he was a sinister person shrouded in mystery. After Logos ReAct malfunctioned, he seemed like the stoic guardian of the world. And now, he gave me the impression of a crafty salesperson. No, it must have been all of this that joined together to form this Dead Apostle and alchemist named Zepia Eltnam Atlasia.

"Is this what you noticed first?"

"Yes, I thought of it when we discussed the Black Madonna and Morgan Le Fay in the underground temple. I only thought of it again because of a hint you gave us during the First Cycle, something about how this place was connected to a Dead Apostle from two thousand years ago."

—“Blackmore is the name of an ancient Dead Apostle with a connection to this land.”

—“A Dead Apostle who controlled birds and lived for more than two thousand years ago, but was unfortunately killed in this script.”

I never thought that those would end up being related.

“Next, all I have to do is follow this to its logical conclusion. Why are you here? Why would you bring up the graveyard and the three parts of a person? I’m a bit ashamed to admit it, but I only became sure of it when I read Heartless’ evidence board.”

“This was a bit of a gamble for me as well,” Zepia said, looking as if he was about to fade into the sunset. (*TN: What, where did that description come from?*) “I can see many possibilities(scripts), and I can measure each of their probabilities. However, there is only ever one reality. Hm. Don’t you plan on asking me about my deal with Heartless?”

“I don’t need to. I’m already certain about that. It’s different for what you gained from it, but what Heartless asked for is obvious.”

“Oh. Do you want to confirm it with me?”

My mentor replied without a moment of hesitation.

“Alright. If Heartless wanted information about the ritual in this village, he wouldn’t have needed to strike a deal with Gray’s mother. Heartless is almost ridiculously cautious— In a certain sense, he’s a bit like me, as he makes so many preparation that it makes him seem cowardly. If that’s the case, there is one thing that he could have asked of you, which is to [not calculate anything related to his future], right?

“And that is how your knowledge of everything that he was involved in was limited. That’s one of the reasons why you could only take a passive stance.”

“A lovely answer. ...And just in case you wanted to know, he provided me with data about the Holy Grail Wars in the past.”

Hearing those words, I felt myself tense up.

Heartless had carefully researched the Fuyuki Holy Grail Wars. That was why he had information that not even the director of the Atlas Institute knew.

However, if Zepia needed this information...

“Ah, there’s no need to be worried. I have no intent on taking part in a Holy Grail War. I’m just curious about the spells behind it. Yes, the process of summoning a Servant, which can reproduce even the soul, is connected to the Third Magic which I wish for.”

The body, the mind, and the soul.

Up to this point, these three concepts had appeared countless times.

However, it was said that no type of magecraft would be able to recreate a soul, except with the use of the Third Magic, something that no mage would be able to attain—an impossible way for humanity to advance forward.

However, that wasn’t that closely related to this case, and my mentor did not ask more questions on the subject. Like my mentor would sometimes say during lectures, excessive knowledge can sometimes lead to danger.

Zepia, however, tilted his head slightly.

“Do you have another question?”

“Can I... ask you something else?”

“You are more than welcome to do so.”

The raven cawed again.

The smell of dinner being cooked reached me. Perhaps it was a hallucination, or perhaps it was the scent of the food from some family at the foot of the mountain wafting by on the wind. It made me think back to my mother’s stew. That taste, which had once sent chills down my spine, now made me feel nostalgic.

“From your point of view, did I make the right choice?”

That was the question my mentor asked.

“That question is meaningless. Though incorrect scripts exist in this world, there is no correct choice. If such a thing did exist, then the Altas Institute would have been saved long ago. Or perhaps the end has already come. I wonder which ending would be easier for us.”

Zepia ended that line there.

I blinked.

The sun had completely disappeared into the horizon. Under the cover of the sticky(TN:??) twilight, I thought I saw something appear on his lips.

“However, I must say... that was a choice that nobody else could make except you, Lord.”

“...Huh?”

I made an awkward sound.

Maybe.

But only maybe.

I was so ensnared by this thought that I didn't even notice that Flat and Svin had returned.

In that moment, I thought that I saw the director of the Atlas Institute, someone so unnaturally emotionless that even a bit of anger felt like a computer having a bug, smile in a very human way.

*

The first thing that struck me upon returning to London was the noise.

The city was filled with all kinds of it, from the music blasting from radios and televisions to the voices of the people, the sound of car engines, the cries of children, and the noises produced by construction. All of it formed a harmony, becoming like some kind of band.

Though there was lots of sound in the countryside as well, the biggest difference was that most of that came from people. That was a type of music that only sounded because the people were alive and had gathered together like they were being melted in a crucible.

“.....”

When I had first arrived in London, I thought that the rows of skyscrapers looked like gravestones. The people that surged into the desaturated buildings looked like a procession of the dead, headed toward the underworld.

Now, I didn't think the same way.

Buildings were buildings, and graveyards were graveyards. No matter how many people gathered in the same place, that fact would not change. There was no need to try and interpret some kind of special meaning from that. Perhaps these thoughts might change again with time, but today, I didn't hate that thought.

I finished everything that I had planned for the morning, and boarded the bus.

My destination was somewhere close to Slur Street, and after getting off, I walked towards the mansion that was not far from the station.

After less than ten minutes, I got there.

As instructed, I walked around the house and to the back garden, where I walked in from the back door after ringing the doorbell twice. I was already familiar with the place, and I didn't need someone to guide me as I walked down the corridor. Even so, every time I took a step on the bright red carpet, I could feel my heartbeat speeding up. I suppose there was nothing I could do about that.

Reines was waiting for me in the parlor.

She saw what I was holding, and blinked several times in surprise.

“Gray, what's that?”

“Um, I wanted to have some desserts with you. ...Usually, Miss Reines is the only one who prepares them.”

I stood there stiffly, hugging the cheap paper bag that seemed so out of place in the elegantly decorated room. Though it was something that I had bought from the department store, I didn't have an eye for delicious things at all. Now, I was finally realizing the importance of being experienced when buying things.

“Is it your treat?”

“Y-yes. My treat for, Miss Reines.”

Reines stared at me for a bit longer with a rare look of sincerity on her face. The atmosphere in the room suddenly became as if this was a blind date(*TN: Not really blind date, more like... uh, the meeting between people where they 'see and assess the suitability of a prospective mate or son/daughter in law'*).

However, seeing me stand there, struggling to hold the bag, she spoke.

“Trimmau, can you find some suitable tea?”

“Understood, ma’am.”

The mercury maid performed a perfect curtsy, and left the room.

She had some white ceramic plates placed onto the table, and I felt a sense of regret as I saw the chocolates that I had brought sitting on them. Just from the presentation alone, I could tell that they could not compare to what Reines usually prepared for us at all. After tasting a piece at her urging, I felt even more ashamed. Even my ears were burning. I felt as if I was a stupid clown. How did I decide that this was a good idea?

And then, Reines took a bite from a piece of chocolate in front of my eyes. Then, she widened her eyes in surprise. Because she was in her own house, her eyes were a shade of brilliant red, which made me feel even more sorry for her.

“...It’s good!”

“U-um, you don’t need to take my feelings into consideration.”

“No, I think it’s weird as well. It does taste incredibly normal. The temperature wasn’t controlled well, so the texture is strange, and the cacao beans used were of mediocre

quality, so it's lacking in flavor... but it really does taste good. Why?" The young woman tilted her head.

She sank into thought, savoring every taste. It didn't look like she was lying. Then again, this wasn't some important social gathering, and I wasn't someone she needed to act polite towards.

I took another piece of chocolate, with the feeling that I had been lied to. From the second piece onward, I realized that it did taste surprisingly good. Though I couldn't analyze the taste like Reines could, I could agree that yes, it was good.

"It's because both of you are enjoying it at the same time. That is what Trimmau thinks."

"That's impossible! How could the taste of something change because of the people around you?" Reines replied, in a rare burst of excitement.

"Is something wrong?"

"Oh, no, nothing," Reines's said with a huff, and then pointed to my teacup. "Have some tea. Teatime is about both desserts and sweets."

"S-sure."

I did as she said and surprised myself again.

As soon as I drank the tea prepared by Trimmau, the originally mediocre chocolate began to melt in my mouth. Though it still wasn't as exquisite as the desserts that Reines usually prepared, which were like they had been decorated with stars plucked out of the night sky, there was a very solid, calming taste there.

Together, we took more and more pieces of chocolate savoring this wonderful time.

Being able to enjoy desserts and tea together made me incredibly happy.

And then, after quietly listening to my account of what had happened at my hometown, Reines spoke.

“I see. Though I’ve also received a report, I never thought that it would be related to the Seven Superweapons of the Atlas Institute. Even for a Lord, those are way to many annoying things to just come across randomly... Though I want to write it off as one, it seems like the cases you two have been a part of aren’t just a coincidence. Yes, in a certain sense, the only coincidence was the initial meeting.”

“...?”

I didn’t quite understand what she was trying to get at, and I tilted my head. Seeing this, a wry smile appeared on Reines’ face.

“I’m talking about the initial meeting between you and my brother.”

She waved her pale fingers across the table, and brushed its edge. Those really were beautiful fingers, I thought, like those of a bisque doll, created to be beautiful. However, I knew how many obstacles she had to overcome and how heavy of a price she had to pay to get here.

“Of course, my brother needed someone who was good at dealing with Servants, but that’s not why you two met. ...I suppose you could say that the same goes for Heartless.” At this, the young woman’s eyes narrowed. “My brother and Dr. Heartless have so many things in common that it’s uncanny. Perhaps it’s because they both were the head of the Department of Modern Magecraft(Norwich), but that doesn’t cause their ways of thinking to be the same.

Perhaps I should say that their characteristics are complementary.”

“Complementary?”

“At least, I think so. Just like Flat and Svin. If they were in the right situation, they could build a mutually supportive relationship. However...”

“However?”

In response to my question, Reines picked up two pieces of chocolate and held one in each hand before smashing them together.

“Both might meet their destruction.”

These words made my heart rate accelerate. The fact that it came from Reines, who was one of the people who understood my mentor the most, made it even more convincing.

Reines put the two smashed pieces of chocolate into her mouth, and looked up at the ceiling, swinging her legs.

“Speaking of that, I’ve also come across something strange in my investigations.”

“Has something happened?”

“It was the new year recently, and there were a lot of banquets being held. I decided to look around a bit. I met with informants from all three factions, the Aristocratic Faction, the Democratic Faction, as well as the Neutral Faction... I found that there were too few rumors being mentioned about the Holy Grail War.”

“Rumors?”

Seeing me tilt my head in confusion, Reines nodded lightly.

“Yep. It is the war that caused the death of the previous Lord of the El-Melloi faction, after all, but other people still think that it’s an insignificant ritual in some remote place. For the Fifth Holy Grail War, the Clock Tower even sent a Sealing Designator to Fuyuki, but this information doesn’t seem to have gotten out there at all. The difference in how the information was distributed seems too unnatural.”

Within the young woman’s examinations, there hid the sensitivity that only someone who was used to the constant whirlwind of power struggles within the Clock Tower would have. Of course, my mentor had that ability as well, but he was different to Reines. In my opinion, I think that other than the amount of experience, it also had to do with the natural differences between the personalities of different people.

“There’s only one organization in the entire world of magecraft that can pull off something like that,” the young woman said, biting into a piece of almond chocolate and raising her index finger. “The Department of Law.”

The image of a mage that we had met many times up to this point appeared in my mind. The woman(person) that reminded me of a snake, who dressed in the clothing of the Far East.

Hishiri Adashino.

It wouldn’t be surprising for her to use any means to reach her goal. In the cases at Adra Castle and the Rail Zeppelin, she did not give up even when faced with my mentor’s deductions. However, there was another reason why thinking of her made me swallow.

“Zepia also said something similar after that.”

“Oh? What did he say?” Reines said, leaning forward with interest.

I anxiously told her of the lines that the alchemist had calmly said to us. “Heartless might be your enemy, but that doesn’t make him the Clock Tower’s enemy... he said.”

I shivered, and an uncomfortable feeling piled up at the bottom of my heart.

The Clock Tower was not some kind of innocent and virtuous organization. It was a place affected by the desires of all sorts of people, corrupt to the core because of the complexity of the structure of power... In this sense, it was completely different from the Atlas Institute. It was impossible to tell an ally from the enemy.

If that was the case, it would only be natural to assume that [Heartless has allies within the Clock Tower.]

“I see. I’ll look into it. But if we’re dealing with the Department of Law here, it’s best not to keep your hopes up. ...The Department of Law isn’t always united within itself, either.”

Reines closed one of her eyes, somewhat melancholily.

Even in a place where scheming was the order of the day, the Department of Law was different. For that reason, Reines was also limited in what she could do.

“Was that all Zepia talked about?”

Reines leaned forward until she was bent over the table like a mischievous cat. Her flame-colored eyes shone brightly. Many people, men and women alike, had probably felt the soul-capturing power of the charm that radiated from them.

“Y-yes.”

“Really? Was it?”

As Reines inched closer and closer to me, a loud, piercing voice sounded from the hook at my right shoulder.

“Ihihihihi! I woke up to a delicious meal, didn’t I?”

“Add!”

“Hahaha, to think that someone as insignificant as Gray would attend a girls’ meetup! You can count me in too! Even though boxes don’t have genders, that doesn’t matter here! If you’re planning on having a pajama party, don’t forget about me! It would be even better if you also invited some pretty girls who—”

I felt that he was asking for it by this point, so I took the birdcage off of the hook and gave it a shake. Though it made a loud cry that sounded like a large insect being smashed to death, I didn’t care at all. Who cared about it, anyway? It didn’t even consider how worried it had made me not long ago.

Reines clapped her hands happily, while Trimmau’s mercury face emotionlessly reflected the image of the howling box.

It was a very enjoyable time.

To the point where I was worried that I might have overdone it and berated Add too much, and ended up apologizing to it.

To the point where tears almost fell uncontrollably from my eyes.

Actually, Zepia had said one more thing.

However, I could not bring myself to tell it to Reines and Add.

*

—This was what he said.

It was after the fight with Logos ReAct.

Add had sank back into slumber, and Zepia had come to discuss something serious with me. My mentor, Flat, and Svin had also happened to be discussing their plans for the future, and they didn't focus their attention on us.

“As thanks, let me give you a word of advice. It would be better if you didn't use Rhongomyniad again.”

“...Huh?”

His advice came out of nowhere, and for a moment, I didn't know how to react.

“W-why?”

“You used Rhongomyniad before while you were on the Rail Zeppelin, right? That is indeed a Noble Phantasm fitting for the end of a case. Even the Servants who play the main roles must succumb in the face of its power. However, you should be glad that you did not release the Seal of Thirteen completely. Otherwise, Add would have undoubtedly been broken.”

“...Ah.”

That reminded me.

Add had been sleeping more ever since the case at the Rail Zeppelin. Was that because it needed to repair itself?

“It's a very intricate Mystic Code, and can repair itself to a certain extent. However, that would be too much. Though incomplete, the burden of unleashing the full power of the lance should not be underestimated. I don't blame you, though. This was a problem even for the original one.”

“The original?”

“You haven’t noticed? There were restrictions put on Add’s memory, but it became very obvious once the mental model of Sir Kay appeared from it. It even successfully created a pseudo-Noble Phantasm, though that’s a feat that was only possible in an imaginary space within the original.”

After a pause, the alchemist of the Atlas Institute made an announcement.

“The core of Add is actually Logos ReAct Replica.”

*

The words of the Alchemist were stuck in my heart, like a thorn that I could not remove. Perhaps my mentor had already noticed it as well. Just like Zepia said, that was a truth that could be reached by stacking a few deductions together. With my mentor’s capabilities, it would be more unnatural if he hadn’t noticed.

...However.

What about the possibility that Add would break?

There were not many situations where I needed to unleash Rhongomyniad. However, if we continued to be involved with Heartless, I couldn’t be certain that such a situation would not come up. The Holy Grail War also came up multiple times, and I could not ensure that nothing problematic would come up.

If the life of my mentor or Reines was in danger, would I use Rhongomyniad again?

This question swirled around my mind. It was the first time that I had been so fixated on something in my life.

The next morning, I left my dorm room and headed out towards Druid Street.

There was still a chill in the air(*TN: Well what do you expect? It's January*), and each breath brought with it a cloud of white. Even if I told everyone in London about how we were experiencing summer a few days ago, nobody would believe us.

The classes at the El-Melloi Classroom had not resumed yet. That was because my mentor, the most important person there, had not returned yet. Though the classes were being taught by all of the other highly skilled teachers of the Department of Modern Magecraft under the lead of Shardan, something felt missing from the classroom.

I stepped off of Druid Street, and into a side road shrouded by a Bounded Field.

This apartment(flat) would sometimes have an unwelcome guest in the form of Yvette, and the other students had often patrolled the area to keep her out. That resulted in the place turning into a dueling arena, before my mentor had chased them all away... I had witnessed all of this not long ago.

I walked up the spiral staircase and knocked on the door a few times before just pushing it open. The door wasn't locked, and as soon as I walked into the foyer, I could see that incredibly messy room. There were books, documents, clothes, cigarettes, and bottles of what resembled medicine scattered all over the room, along with a few bottles of alcohol, cans, and other miscellaneous items, creating a kind of chaos unlike any other.

I couldn't help but smile a wry smile when I saw that familiar figure inside the room.

Perhaps he was a bit too relaxed, I thought. My mentor was reclined on the sofa, with his back to a replica of a painting depicting the cutting of the Gordian knot. To be exact, it was

more like he was laying on top of the sofa. He was concentratedly gripping onto the game controller in his hands.

“Sir, I’ve bought the snacks and drinks that you asked for.”

“Thanks, just put them over there,” my mentor said with a cigarette in his mouth as he stared unblinkingly at the LCD screen.

He had a slight stubble on his chin. He had probably played through the entire night. He said that he was staying home to rest up and recover, and I didn’t expect that he would end up using it all to game.

No. I take back what I just said. I had long since anticipated that this would happen. It was my mentor, after all.

I sighed.

“Can I at least help you comb your hair?”

“Do whatever you want to,” my mentor said, not shifting his gaze from his screen.

Seeing him stare that intently, I started to worry somewhat about his eyes, but there was probably a way to fix that with magecraft. If that time really came, he’d probably grumble for an entire week about the bill that had one more digit than one from a regular doctor.

Either way, I asked him to sit in a position that made it easier for me to comb his hair and gently picked up a strand of hair. I took out a comb and started brushing it for him.

Though he lived so carelessly, there were hardly any split ends. Was this because of some kind of magecraft? Though I knew that he had grown out his hair for the sake of magecraft, I remembered him mocking himself once by

saying that there wasn't much of a risk or much of a reward for a male mage to do this. It was very much in my mentor's style to criticize himself while still continuing to do something, though.

The game that he was playing now seemed like an RPG, and every time the red-haired, armored protagonist swung a sword, monsters fell with fancy-looking effects. My mentor had played all sorts of games, but he seemed to like Japanese-style RPGs the most.

"...Can I ask you something?" I asked.

"As long as you don't mind me answering while I play."

Hearing this careless answer made me happy for some reason. Only a little bit, though.

I eyed the things that were on the table.

"Did Mr. Melvin bring these?"

"Yes. He came over the day we arrived back in London and forced me to accept a bunch of magecraft medicines, canned food, and wine. I happened to be hungry, so I took it."

"I see."

Half were necessities, and half were non-essential. It looked like something that Melvin would do. He understood how my mentor would temporarily accept things if he needed it. However, he would probably carefully catalogue everything that my mentor took and add it all to the list of favors that my mentor needed to repay. That self-proclaimed best friend of best friends was generous, yet counted his debts like a devil at the same time.

However.

The fact that he was concerned and came to visit my mentor at a time like this made me happy.

This case had been far too exhausting.

Though we had solved it, we had both returned with scars. Even if they were invisible to the eye, they could affect our will to go on.

This was the first time that nobody had died. The fact that we had successfully saved my mother and Father Fernando should have made me happy and satisfied, but only a sticky feeling of fatigue remained in me.

Perhaps this was because I felt that [this was not over.]

The case was not over yet. We had not gotten to the most crucial part.

For a time, there was only the sound of the game, breathing, and the comb softly swishing across hair.

Then, my mentor suddenly spoke.

“...I shouldn’t have asked that question.”

He didn’t have to elaborate for me to know what he was talking about.

It was the question he had asked Zepia whether he had made the correct choice.

“I thought that I had grown at least a little bit, but I haven’t changed at all. I’m still as immature as I used to be. It really is hard for people to change.”

“You said something similar when we first met.”

I recalled what he had said.

—“I haven’t grown at all. Nothing has changed since then. I haven’t gotten even a single step closer to the person I wanted to be.”

I had felt the blood that seeped from those words.

It was probably because of this that I had chosen to follow my mentor. I had thought that even if this person would not give me the correct answer, we could suffer together.

I was not wrong.

However, I never thought that we would end up suffering like this.

“I’m even less mature than you are, so I always want to shout that I want someone to tell me that what I did was right.”

“Both of us are lazy then, aren’t we?”

“Perhaps.”

I slowed down the brushing of his hair and nodded.

A brief silence settled upon the room again. The hero in the game was running furiously. It seemed as if the end was approaching. The wizard had already learned many pages full of spells. I couldn’t help but feel a sense of irony seeing my mentor control a character that used magic.

“There’s something I want to tell you first,” my mentor muttered, still staring at the screen. “Cherish your friends. Even if it’s become an untenable situation, you don’t need to pay some sort of strange price for me. I’m already resigned to my fate of having to rely on the protection of my students, but if I’m bringing my students any necessary suffering, I might as well go die.”

“.....”

...He saw straight through me.

Add was still asleep, and did not interrupt.

My mentor continued gaming with a face so expressionless he looked like he hated life. Had he already figured out what I was troubled about, or did he just not care? Or was he just as troubled by it as I was?

“...Alright.” I nodded. Suddenly, a mischievous thought arose in my mind. “That’s not fair, Sir. (*TN: I don’t understand what 願意 translates to in this context so that’s going to have to do*)”

“Oh. Um, really?”

“Yes. You keep asking things of other people, but you’re always making sacrifices. That’s way too irresponsible.”

“...I’m sorry.”

He hung his head and apologized sincerely.

“I forgive you. But you have to answer my question.”

“What question?” He asked.

I continued to comb his hair as I quietly adjusted my breathing.

I had wanted to ask about this for the past couple of days. I hurriedly organized my thoughts into something coherent, and spoke.

“You said something during the Second Cycle about how you didn’t have the courage to meet a version of me that didn’t know you.”

“You still remember that,” my mentor said with a frown.

It seemed like he was reluctant to think about what he said then.

Actually, I felt embarrassed about it as well. If my mentor had not recognized me, I was sure that I would have had a breakdown on the spot. Perhaps I would have even physically fallen apart.

However, I needed to know the answer to this question, no matter what it took

“Then, do you have the courage to meet a version of you king that doesn’t know who you are?”

“.....”

He didn’t respond immediately.

“You’ve probably already made mental preparations for that, right? You said something on the Rail Zeppelin about how you wouldn’t be able to repay the happiness of having those memories, even if you spent your entire life. But does being prepared mean that you have the courage to do something like that? What does a person have to do to gain that kind of courage?”

I needed courage too, I thought, so I could go and meet my mother again before I figured out exactly what I had to say. So I wouldn’t have to wait for Add and Reines to notice what was on my mind, and could tell them the truth. So I could tell everyone around me that if they were not there, I would be too scared to even fall asleep. What should I do to find that kind of bravery?

For a moment, there was only the sound of the clacking of keys.

I would wait. Though I didn’t think of myself as a patient person, sometimes, I could wait for something, no matter

how long it took.

Finally,

“Since I’ve given up on taking part in the Fifth Holy Grail War, I won’t get to meet him again anyway.”

With those words as an opening statement, he held onto the cigarette with his fingers.

Gray smoke drifted up toward the ceiling. As it did, my mentor spoke in a low voice.

“But... I’ve still thought about what I’d say to him if some kind of miracle did happen. So no, I don’t have the courage to do that,” he said with a slight smile. “However, if a day like that really comes, regardless of whether I have the courage to or not... I hope I can be someone who can walk up even though I’ll say the wrong thing. ...That’s all I have to say.”

His somewhat embarrassed expression was reflected in my heart.

The overly sincere look in his eyes even made me feel troubled.

Everything from Add’s true form to the Clock Tower and Heartless seemed distant in that moment, and all my attention was focused on the comb in my hands.

I knew very well that this time would not last.

Because both my mentor and I knew that, just like the Holy Grail War, this series of events centered around the Clock Tower was about to reach its final act.

-End of Epilogue of Book 7-

Explanation :

By Hikaru Sakurai

(*TN: Like last time, everything enclosed in brackets, unless marked as a Translator's Note, was originally written there in brackets.*)

Magecraft |meɪdʒkra:ft| (*TN: alternatively, majutsu*)

A mysterious art capable of enrapturing someone's mind.
—Shin Meikai Kokugo Jiten(*TN: the new clear Japanese dictionary?*), Second Edition

A method of performing wonders with the help of supernatural beings or mystical powers.
—Encyclopedia Nipponica

A mysterious, magical art used to bewitch the minds of people. Sorcery. Magic.
—Nihon Kokugo Daijiten(*TN: also known as the Shogakukan's Japanese Dictionary*)

Though it is defined as this in modern times, in the past, knowledge was also magecraft.

Back in the distant past, in an age where our ancestors lived, the knowledge and skills to perform prayers and rituals was a type of magecraft.

Before the advent of modern science, discoveries and inventions were part of a mage's power and value, something that they could not reveal to the rest of the world.

In ancient Sumer, Egypt, India, China, and the Mediterranean (mainly in Greece), it was said that mages would keep their techniques secret. Through the passing of time, more and more was made public and shown to the

world. Eventually, this became science. At the same time, the mystery and intrigue of the study of Mystery was analyzed and taken apart by the self-proclaimed discloser of secrets(*TN:?*), Éliphas Lévi.

I'm sure that everyone here has already noticed.

Magecraft(*TN: Actually more like magic but whatever that doesn't matter*). The concealment of Mystery. All of these are incredibly similar to the "mages" of the universe in this book, a group which includes the main character, Lord El-Melloi II.

Hiding their mystery from the eyes of the public, living a life in the gaps of history and society, and honing their skills. Yes, they are just like those people in real life.

I think that this must have been intentional.

A setting that Mr. Kinoko Nasu intentionally linked with reality as he passionately wrote out and created the worlds of Kara no Kyoukai, Tsukihime, Fate/Stay Night, Mahotsukai no Yoru, and many other works.

We can't easily see everything in this world, and a whole vast world of hidden truths exist just outside what our eyes can reach.

An astonishing amount of imagination and skill combined with a detailed knowledge of its basis combined to form this, shining brightly with an orthodox style in the firm of a story we call a fantasy novel.

Now, several years after the publication of some of these works, there still exists a story that inherited this fighting style(style).

He is a writer who wrote with a clear intention, a great deal of talent, and a delicate way of weaving words.

That writer's name was Mr. Sanda Makoto.

As all of you may know, Mr. Sanda Makoto is an author with a long history of writing about magic, from the Rental Magica series to the more recent Cross X Regalia (*TN: He also wrote Angels of Death?? That's surprising*). He knows the place that magecraft(*TN: Alternatively, magic*) occupies between reality and fiction, and sometimes expands the worlds as he interprets them, giving life to the characters that inhabit them. Such is how stories that are that pleasing to read are born.

And that was why it almost seemed inevitable that Mr. Sanda, who is also known as an ally of Mr. Kinoko Nasu, would be the one working on one of the latest works in this universe ("this universe" referring to what Mr. Yuichiro Higashide described in his commentary of the fifth book in this series, the Fate universe, the universe of TYPE-MOON, or what is referred to abroad as the Nasuverse).

Now, in the seventh installment of this series, the fourth case of this story has ended.

What kind of journey would Lord El-Melloi, who had fought and [managed to survive] along with what you could call visitors from the past, and Gray take on next? Would the mystery of this series be revealed at the part of the story we call the end, much like how mystery had been disclosed with the passing of time?

Please await and anticipate the results of Mr. Sanda Makoto's work, the final case of the Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II, which begins with the end of this book. I trust that he will definitely come up with a satisfying ending. Just like how Éliphas Lévi stepped forward to challenge Mystery, and like how Lord El-Melloi II stepped forward to challenge these cases.

Afterword:

By Sanda Makoto

—Perhaps you could compare it to a promise made long ago. Or a smile of someone that lived only in the memories of others. Is it more of a blessing for memories of the dead to gradually fade, or for them to disappear forever?

Thank you all for your patience. The seventh book of the Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II, the Contract of Atlas(Lower) is now available.

The last volume ended on the reveal of the sinister secrets behind the village, and a new character (who had previously been lurking about throughout the story). I'm sure that there were readers that had eagerly anticipated what would happen next, and so I am more relieved than anyone to be able to release this book.

Just like I wrote of at the end of the last book, this is a story about graveyards and death.

In this context, the graveyards are not just places for the dead to rest. They are places where the living could face the concept of death, assess the way that they lived now, and search for a path for the future. The dead were not just people who had passed from this world, but the thoughts that existed deep inside our hearts.

For that reason, in the story that I have told about Gray's hometown, Blackmore Graveyard, involves the past, the present, as well as the future. The mystery of this entire series has begun to appear, and I have reread drafts of this book countless times to ensure the order of events,

Besides that, this story does not only tell of graves and death. It also tells the story of the long-awaited dream of

the villagers, the ever-present shadow of the Atlas Institute, and the Holy Church that watches over them.

In this village that seems somewhat strange at a glance, the desires and thoughts of all sorts of people and organizations converge, creating a special type of darkness only possible in the TYPE-MOON universe. Perhaps some would call this darkness “madness”, but it is also full of charm... Knowing that a story created with this kind of thought process can be enjoyed by so many of you brings me an incredible amount of joy.

*

Well then, the manga version of the Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II, which I brought up in the last book, has finally been serialized on Young Ace! I can't describe how moved I was when I first received the storyboards from Azuma Tou-sensei! The finished product was even more full of each of the vibes from every mage. The only thing I'm waiting on now is what it will look like once it's printed.

I would also like to thank Kiyomune Miwa for always helping me and meticulously checking over the magecraft elements, Mineji Sakamoto for creating powerful a beautiful illustrations, Ryogo Narita for checking the lines related to Flat, and everyone at TYPE-MOON, including Kinoko Nasu and OKSG, for supervising and editing the book.

Like I mentioned before in an interview on TYPE-MOON Ace, the plan to make the Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II into a five-part series was made at the very beginning. The first would be an introduction, the second would be to define the “shape” of the story, the third would be the turning point, and the fourth would accelerate the story while reusing some foreshadowing.

Though I say that, this journey didn't go exactly according to plan.

Along the way, Fate/Grand Order was launched, and the Case Files manga I mentioned also began to be serialized. That's why the story became far more complicated than I had originally planned, and also gained more meaning. I have spent the better part of a year thinking about how I could develop the characters and world that had been entrusted to me. After scrapping countless plans and painstakingly selecting what guest characters to bring in, the fourth story arc has come to an end.

In the next book, we will finally enter into the last leg of the series. The story of Lord El-Melloi II, Gray, and the students of the El-Melloi classroom will soon come to its conclusion.

I hope that every one of you can see this story to the end. Let us meet again in the summer.

November 2017, while reading the manga version of the Case Files of El-Melloi II
-End of Afterword of Book 7-

Link to the translation of the next book :

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/11MsmJ3CfITiZ8SEQvTYMToXpAfIUzAmjCzgnPRPtyM/edit?usp=sharing>